

COILHOUSE

A LOVE LETTER TO ALTERNATIVE CULTURE

issue **02**

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Polaroids of Coilhouse staff, contributors, readers and friends from Issue 01 launch party, taken by Lou O'Bedlam & Drew Yoon.

issue02

Letter from the Editors

Late last summer, with Issue 01 hot off the presses, *Coilhouse Magazine* donned combat boots and a rhinestone tiara, and threw itself one hell of a coming-out party at a small art gallery in downtown LA. There were monkeyshines and fisticuffs and thereministrations. There were art stars and stoners and supervillians [sic], feral hipsters and filthy-mouthed, Electric Lemonade-swilling Suicide Girls. Best of all, there was you, dear reader. Or, at the very least, there were delegates in attendance to represent you. Many of the faces you see here are from the *Coilhouse* blog readership, folks we'd never met before in real life, but kin all the same. Finally getting the chance to personally, physically molest some of you made the whole event worthwhile. Despite the party's smashing success we had no assurances that *Coilhouse* would sell, but as this issue goes to print, we've officially sold out of the limited edition 01. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

The future is still uncertain, but we're more hopeful than ever. We have brilliant collaborators. We have supportive friends and patrons. Meanwhile, on a grander scale, there's a new, historic president on his way into the White House. Despite continued warmongering and a bleak economic outlook, we think it's safe to say that this entire country is more hopeful right now than it's been a long time.

For us, it all comes back to a sense of community and a need to share beauty and joy with one another. The revered Japanese aikido sensei Mitsugi Saotome once said, "if you were all alone in the universe with no one to talk to, no one with which to share the beauty of the stars... what would be your purpose in life? It is other life, it is love, which gives your life meaning. This is harmony. We must discover the joy of each other, the joy of challenge, the joy of growth."

Here's wishing all of us much growth, harmony and joy in 2009.

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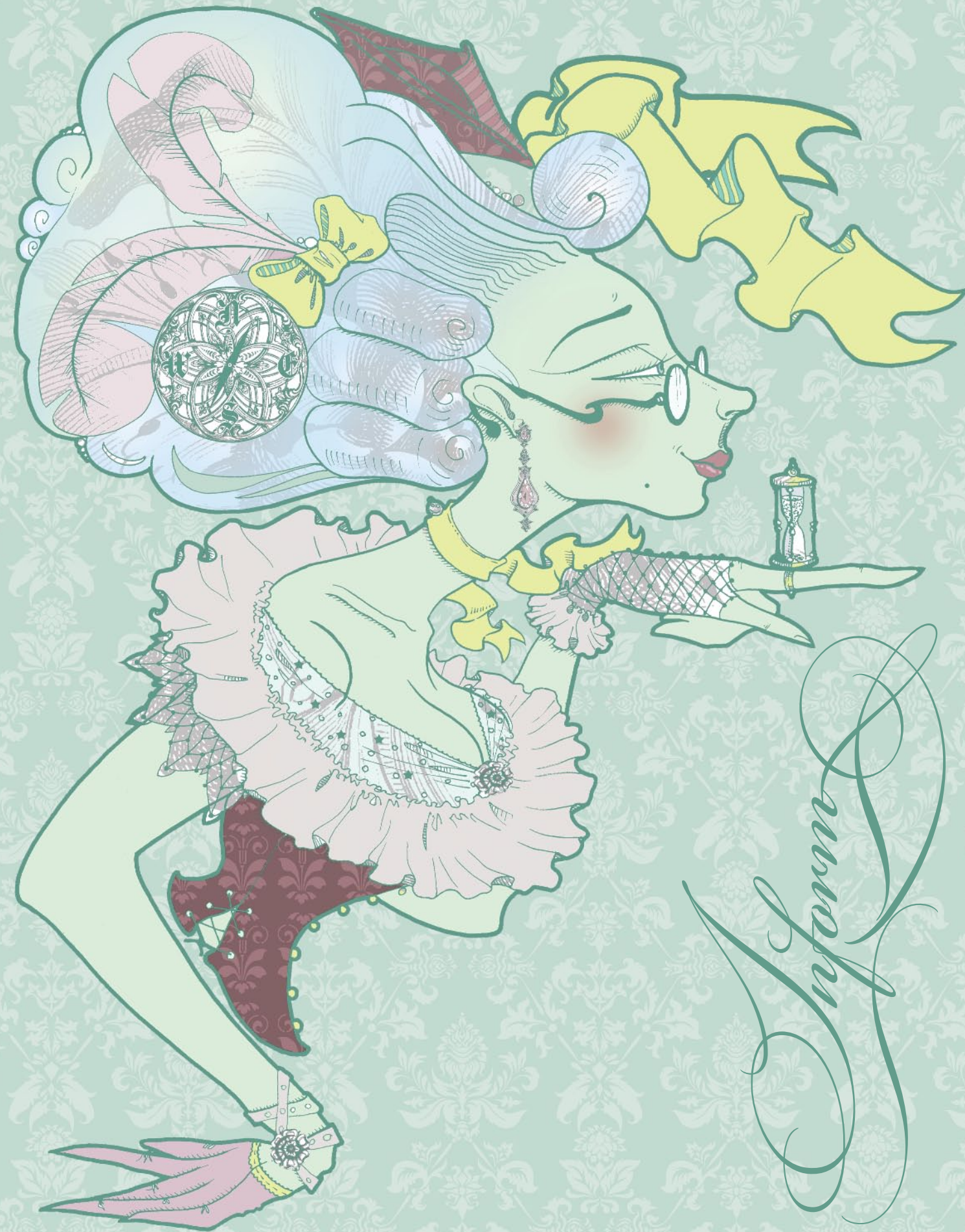


ILLUSTRATION Zoetica Ebb

OLD IRON & NEW FLESH

A BRIEF HISTORY OF CYBORG HANDS

1504: THE IRON HAND OF GÖTZ VON BERLICHINGEN

Götz Von Berlichingen had a problem. At the tender age of 24, the plundering knight, mercenary and all-around-bastard's future was threatened by a cannon blast that tore off most of his right arm. As someone who made his living off war and already had a long list of enemies, Götz needed his killing hand.

So he got another one. Made of iron.

This was no crudely shaped hunk of metal, but a mechanical masterpiece created centuries ahead of its time. Complete with articulated fingers, spring action, and an array of levers and buttons, the hand allowed Götz a stunning degree of control, even by today's standards. Once fitted with it, the knight could curl his metal fingers around items as large as a lance or as small as a quill; the hand did not lose its grip.

The identity of the metalworker who forged it has been lost to the ages. Putting their genius in perspective: in the era that Götz's iron hand was accomplishing such intricate tasks, steam power remained a distant dream and Copernicus had barely begun to deduce that Earth wasn't the center of the universe.

Götz was, by all reports, a proud man, and not a patient one. No doubt it took countless hours to master the new hand. While history has devoted volumes to Götz's dashing and brutal exploits, to Götz the scrapper and survivor, one can just as easily imagine the fearless marauder fighting back tears of frustration as he made initial fumbling attempts to wield a sword or pen a letter.

Still, Götz – and his iron fist – went on to great infamy. Twice he was outlawed by the Holy Roman Emperor: first for mugging a particularly loaded group of merchants, and once again after he captured and held a wealthy count for ransom. Götz pillaged towns, helped lead (and later ditch) a peasant revolt, and slaughtered scores of Turks, Frenchmen, and fellow Germans. A bishop once demanded his surrender – he thundered back: “*Er kann mich im Arsch lecken!*” Roughly translated, that's “Kiss my ass!”

The phrase has since become somewhat popular.

Later in life, he claimed to prefer his new appendage to the one he'd been born with, stating that the reproduction had “rendered more service in the fight than ever did the original flesh.” Götz accomplished another feat often denied his ilk: he retired and died in bed.

Tales of his larger-than-life persona and deeds have survived the centuries, and so has his iron hand, preserved today in the museum at his old Jagsthausen castle. Goethe wrote a five-act play, *Götz Von Berlichingen with the Iron Hand*, which faithfully reenacts the knight's grand exploits, short of granting him a peaceful retirement. (Not enough drama. The Romantics preferred to see their anti-heroes die tragically.) Sartre, taking a different tack, portrayed him as a ruthless butcher and existentialist symbol. And of course, “kiss my ass” is still shouted loudly and proudly the world over.

Long after Götz was cold in the ground, doctors realized that the device borne from his thuggish necessity could improve the lives of thousands. So it was that that the masterwork of Götz's anonymous craftsman, with its levers and fixed digits, eventually became the basis for today's prosthetics.

2008: THE LUKE SKYWALKER ARM

What of tomorrow's? Many whims of classic science fiction – computers, space travel, cell phones – have passed into reality. Artificial legs have had major advances, as evidenced by double-amputee sprinter Oscar Pistorius, who almost made it to the Beijing Olympics. Yet the glistening cybernetic arm has remained a fiction. Most of today's upper body prosthetics are little more advanced than Götz's iron hand.

That's changing.

It would be hard to imagine a person more different from Götz than Chuck Hildreth, one of the “test pilots” for DEKA Labs ultramodern arm. Hildreth, a double amputee for 26 years, lost his arms in a horrible electrocution accident. He has no reputation of daring deeds and he doesn't make his living by the sword. (Although it bears mentioning that, dissatisfied with the available prosthetics, he eventually learned how to change a lawnmower blade with his feet, a valiant skill in anyone's book!)

In a video released for the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, Hildreth is seen stripped to the waist with a complex harness spanning his chest. Emerging from the left side of his body, whirring with electronics, is a shining metal arm. DEKA's engineers have gleefully dubbed their creation the “Luke Skywalker arm” and truly, the resemblance is uncanny.

With this arm, Hildreth picks up a grape before eating it, drinks a bottle of milk, holds and operates a power tool. A particularly vexing barrier for would-be cyberneticists is finding some way to give the wearer any sort of meaningful control over the arm, and technology closely linking mind and machine is still highly experimental. The Luke arm is completely noninvasive.

Grinning, Hildreth wiggles his little toe to point the arm downward. A twitch on the ball of his feet, and the wrist turns. “It's kind of liberating,” Hildreth says, looking into the camera. He has sensation too: sensors in the thumb send increasing vibrations to a pack on his side as his grip tightens.

DEKA founder Dean Kamen has said publicly that today's artificial arms are “Flintstones” compared to advances being made in other areas. But, as in Götz's time, war is pushing the science of prosthetics forward as human ingenuity seeks to repair damage wrought by human brutality. DEKA can afford to develop their Luke prototype because the Defense Department's

research branch, DARPA, gave them \$8.1 million in funding. The prosthesis is intended for hundreds of wounded soldiers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, and may be FDA-approved as soon as 2009.

Sponsorship of the Luke arm is only one part of DARPA's much larger initiative to pull prosthetics into the 21st century. They have also given John Hopkins University, in conjunction with the University of Utah, \$30 million to tackle the mind-machine link head-on. JHU's research is at the cutting edge of neuroscience, attempting to find ways to sink “neural spikes” directly into the brain to allow control of an electronic arm. Despite facing significant hurdles, they predict to start human trials within a year.

The U.S. government isn't alone in pushing the technology forward. At Vanderbilt University, professor Michael Goldfarb and his students hit upon a possible solution to another problem: the comparative weakness of robotic limbs to their human equivalents. They decided to chuck the clunky batteries and tried powering their prosthesis with rocket fuel. As it turns out, rocket fuel works much better.

Some of the bionics have already hit the street. In October, Canadians

Larry Hayes-Richards and Rob Anderson were both fitted with new arms developed by the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago (in another DARPA program). Nerves in their shoulders were surgically redirected to healthy chest muscles and then attached to electrodes that direct the motorized arms. Seven patients are now wearing these arms in their daily lives.

In the heady rush of witnessing such advancements, it's all too easy to get carried away: “rocket punches aren't for video games anymore, kids! Artificial skin will feel just like the real stuff! Cyberpunk neural links for everyone!” Yes, it brings a dirty throb to any futurist's pulse to think that we may yet see the World of Tomorrow that slipped past the children of the '50s. We, odds be damned, will get our flying car.

But it's also time to come back down to earth. Both Götz's iron hand and the far shinier Luke arm developed as rough creatures of function: at the end of the day they're built for practical use, as every worthwhile gadget must be.

Today's improvisations become tomorrow's foundations.

Hildreth brings that fact home better than anything else. When asked about his desire he doesn't wax rhapsodic about the stunning implications of the device he's wearing. He just wants to be able to peel and eat a banana without smashing it.

As far as dreams of the future go, it's a good start.

ARTICLE David Forbes
ILLUSTRATION Emil Petrinic



Welcome to Los Angeles. The once-desert I call home is the city everyone loves to hate, the butt of a thousand scornful jokes and perpetually resented. Blame the bad rap on the effects of the entertainment industry spreading through its sun-baked streets like a monstrous cephalopod. Blame the scorn on LA's infuriatingly awkward city planning – or, rather, the lack thereof – and the oft-bland architecture, much of it hastily constructed during the 1920s film boom. Blame the pollution, the noise, the frenzied pace. Like the Villa Straylight, Los Angeles is a confounded conurbation whose development, instead of reaching upwards, spreads ever outwards in continual, disjunctive waves.

Once called the Town of Our Lady the Queen of the Angels, this international hub of business and entertainment steeped in the vapors of excess, drama, soaring hope and crushing disappointment. Target of tabloids, home of the world's most embarrassing celebrities and celebri-nots, victim of earthquakes and wildfires, LA is all too easy to fear and dismiss. I get that. I hated it here, too. Years of my life passed in self-imposed isolation. Hidden away in my Hollywood cave, muttering over unfinished paintings, I blamed this town for everything. Then, relatively recently, something changed – a subtle shift. For some instinctive reason, instead of moving away in 2005 as planned, I stayed.

New details of the ominous urban sprawl came into focus, pixel by pixel. An obscure film screening here, a specialty surplus warehouse there... before I knew it, my hate had changed into love. As it turns out, beyond the spray tans and salesmen thrive bohemian oases lush enough to make even the harshest skeptic reconsider. Perhaps that's how this place is – stingy at first, it doles out its many secrets one by one to the enduring and the patient. This is a love letter to Los Angeles, a treasure map for the isolated, lost and skeptical.

“HERE, THE SPIRIT OF CURIOSITY WAFTS THROUGH THE DIM CORRIDORS, GUIDING PATRONS TO THE LOST, FORGOTTEN AND ABSURD.”

1. DOWNTOWN ART WALK



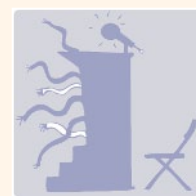
Downtown Los Angeles is an enigmatic place. In recent decades, the area has become a social wasteland inhabited by big business and a massive homeless population, and yet, here also are Blade Runner's Bradbury building, the Orpheum Theater, and several exquisite hotels built in the 1930s. Add a variety of dive bars and lofts filled with artists, and you have the perfect setting for a cultural hive. The Downtown Art Walk is a self-guided walking tour that opens dozens of gallery doors every second Thursday of the month. This LA art scene's most recent addition even has a shuttle service available for the lazy, infirm, or fashionably-hooved. The newly designated Gallery Row now houses nearly forty art spaces that participate in this event. Hundreds of art enthusiasts come here for an evening of culture, mingling and, naturally, free wine. The Downtown Art Walk has fast become one of the city's chief attractions, reviving the district and stimulating small business growth in this once forsaken part of town. downtownartwalk.com

2. LITTLE TOKYO HISTORIC DISTRICT



Nestled amidst the monoliths of downtown, Little Tokyo offers a bounty of entertainment, goods and food. Authentic ramen, shabu-shabu, fresh sushi and Japanese-style bar food await the hungry, with several bakeries to satiate sugar cravings. Summer street festivals and the Japanese American Cultural Center's year-round calendar of performances, ranging from traditional Japanese puppet theatre to modern dance, help attract an eclectic crowd to Little Tokyo's 4-block span. You'll find karaoke, a variety of shops including a branch of Kinokuniya (a franchise book store), which carries up-to-date Japanese magazines, books, stationery and hard to find pens, including my new favorite weapon of choice – the Copic Multiliner.

3. THE MACHINE PROJECT



Art space, home of Dorkbot SoCal, miniature lecture hall and experimental kitchen, this place has hosted some of the best events in town. Visitors enjoy a friendly atmosphere, a large donation-sucking MegaTube and beer, as the boundaries between art and science melt away. What other single place offers workshops on Romba hacking, wearable computers, deep-frying, Entomology vs. Etymology and tabla drumming? Who will give you music, poetry, sewing classes, lectures and more? Who'll whisk you away on field trips to electronic surplus shops? No one! None can touch this supreme hub of creativity, science and fun. machineproject.com

4. MUSEUM OF JURASSIC TECHNOLOGY



Sequestered on a bleak stretch of Venice Boulevard, the Museum of Jurassic Technology is a shrine to the obscure and ephemeral. Created twenty years ago by David and Diana Wilson, this repository seeks to entertain, perplex and inspire. If a museum is indeed a space of muses, MJT's collection delivers. Here, the spirit of curiosity wafts through dim corridors, guiding patrons to relics of the lost, forgotten and absurd. As you study ancient rat-eating remedies, hover above microscopes focused on hair carvings or are hypnotized by the heavenly tinabulations of the Bell Wheel, the din of the mundane world gently ebbs away. A small library contains literature on the subject of Napoleon and Josephine. The Borzoi Kabinet Theater on the second floor screens films made in Russia by David Wilson especially for the museum. Those with time to spare can take a rest and reflect over a cup of Georgian tea in the

Tula Tea Room. One thing to keep in mind: an afternoon spent at the Museum of Jurassic Technology can leave you in a mild but not unpleasant state of puzzlement, much as a foray beyond the looking glass might do. mjt.org

5. CEMETERY SCREENINGS



The Hollywood Forever Cemetery is a beautiful stretch of grass and graves, landscaped with lush trees, impressive timeworn mausoleums and a gorgeous reflecting pool. Dubbed “The Resting Place of Hollywood Immortals”, it is home to the remains of Johnny and Dee Dee Ramone, Jayne Mansfield, Rudolph Valentino and many more. Few pastimes are more serene than a day spent wandering around these grounds. The air is clean, the residents are quiet and the staff is fairly invisible. In 2002 the fine people of Cinespia began conducting regular screenings of old, obscure and cult films, projecting them onto the side of Valentino's mausoleum. Hundreds gather at the cemetery gates well in advance to ensure a choice spot on the lawn. These lines are a captivating sight: a queer caravan representing of all manner of Angel City dwellers. Toting blankets, lawn chairs, food and wine, Hollywood punks and elderly couples from Burbank picnic side by side. The projection begins with a slide show of vintage movie posters, and guest DJs spin everything from Skinny Puppy to Ravi Shankar while people unpack food baskets, light candles and toast with paper cups. The first time can be a bit overwhelming, so Cinespia's website offers a few how-to tips for novices. cinespia.org

6. THE EDISON



The Edison Lounge is a new nightclub built around the remnants of a turn-of-the-century power plant downtown. Located in the basement of the 1906 Higgins Building, this 10,000 square foot industrial space lay under several feet of floodwater for decades, until owner/designer Andrew Meieran (along with business partner Marc Smith) undertook the Herculean task of resuscitating it. From its art deco-decked cabaret space The Lab, to the Generator Lounge and Boiler Room (literally an enormous brick-lined boiler, carved out to create a cozy, candlelit cave), to its delicious Tesla Fries and absinthe drinks, the Edison is thematic aesthetic perfection. Unsurprisingly, it's been Coilhouse staff meeting headquarters since the very beginning. – *Meredith Yayanos*

Zo notes: There is not a single place I've been that compares to The Edison's splendor on a quiet night. Unfortunately for romantic types, crowds are a side effect of immense popularity and the mystical mood is often overwhelmed by herds of patrons. I recommend a weeknight for your first visit. www.edisondowntown.com

7. TACO TRUCKS



You can't possibly know how important readily available Mexican food is to your quality of life until you've lived in Southern California. For any style of Mexican food you crave, from Baja to Chiapas, LA's got you covered. But the humble lonchera is the rumbling engine of the city's Mexican cuisine. The best trucks, like my favorite in Koreatown, flaunt visible spits of slowly roasting al pastor topped with a pineapple. (That's right, I said Koreatown. *All* of LA, from the ocean to the Eastside, is blessed with peripatetic carne asada.) Every truck will have the staples: tacos and burritos with asada or pastor, but each contributes its own unique variation on the theme. While a few tentative steps have been taken towards codifying this information

Malibu Principality



Duchy Valley



Angel City



Hollywood.

7. taco truck

5. cemetery screenings

11. magnolia



9. the ocean at night



Santa Monica.

4. museum of jurassic technology

10. nova express

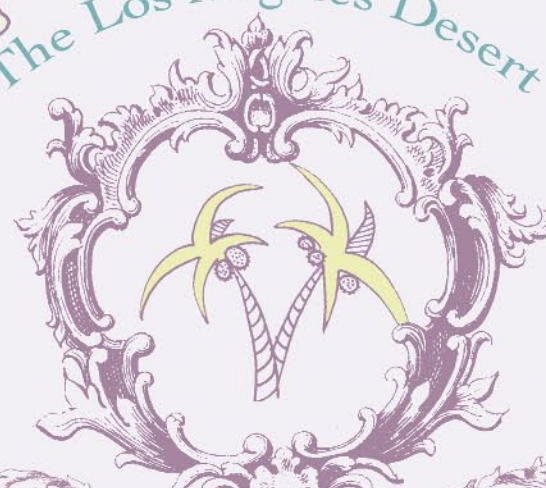
Echo Park.

3. the machine project

8. frutas



The Los Angeles Desert



6. the edison

Downtown.

1. art walk

2. little tokyo



"BEYOND THE SPRAY TANS AND SALESMEN THRIVE BOHEMIAN OASES LUSH ENOUGH TO MAKE THE HARSHTEST SKEPTIC RECONSIDER."

online, knowing just where and when to get precisely what you crave from a taco truck remains largely street knowledge. Enjoy a pickled radish, and don't forget to wash down your meal with a tooth-bracingly sweet tamarind-flavored Jarritos soda. — *Daniel Hengeveld*

8. FRUTAS



skip the salt. On a scorching summer day, I live for this delicacy.

Another mobile Mexican staple, chilled fruit carts have made their way here, and LA is a far better place for it. Ask for "everything" and you'll get a bag of sliced melon, mango, coconut and sometimes cucumber, sprinkled with lime juice, salt and chili powder. The cold, juicy tang has got to be one of the finest flavor combinations in the world. This divine manna costs close to nothing and is a healthy alternative to ice cream, especially if you

9. THE OCEAN AT NIGHT



Bikinis, surfboards, greased muscles and ice cream-dripping toddlers! While sunlit beach culture isn't for me, a midnight walk along the ocean, especially someplace desolate like San Pedro, is marvelous. Some nights, all I want is an infinite stretch of black sky-water, the waves' murmur, and wet sand. During low tides, all manner of anemone, starfish, and crab lie in plain view of those with flashlights and cameras.

10. IN MEMORIAM: NOVA EXPRESS



Established in the early 90s, this surreal pizza joint closed its doors on March 5, 2008. Nova Express knew all the ways to my heart — excellent food, spectacular space decor, low lights and late hours. I'd been a regular at Nova ever since my pre-teens. Fifteen full years of celebrating, mourning and congregating. In fact, our very first Coilhouse staff meeting was held there, over cosmic pizza and alarmingly powerful martinis. I miss the vintage anime projections, the legions of vintage plastic robots, the all-seeing plush Cthulhu reposing in one corner, the coveted amoeba-shaped table in the window with its lava lamp askew, every last bit of the place, damn it. novaexpresscafe.com

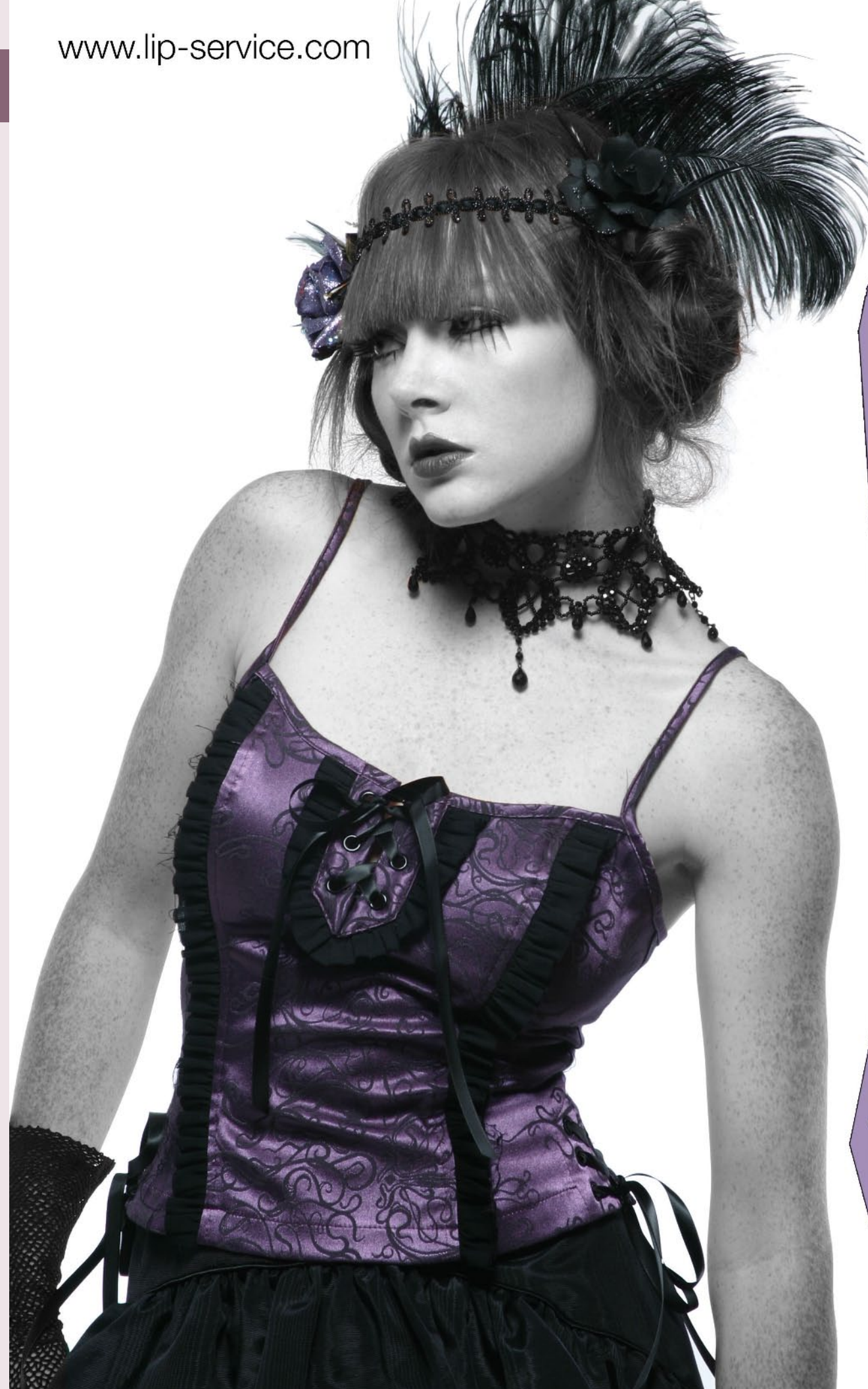
11. MAGNOLIA TREES



Perhaps the most sad and telling tenure of my hermitage in LA is that I never noticed the magnolia trees blooming all over my Hollywood neighborhood. In fact, I'd often reminisce about the Crimean magnolias of my childhood, planted in luscious, shady rows by the edge of the Black Sea. These days, magnolias seem to be everywhere I look! Their large, oval leaves are dark green, reassuringly thick and waxy. The equally large flowers, with their sturdy petals of pale cream, are fleshy and fantastically aromatic. It's fun to pretend I wished them into existence, but the truth is, they were there all along, patiently waiting for me to open my eyes.

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SerVice

lip

DE-EVOLUTION IN THE 21ST CENTURY

THE AVANT-GARDE AS DERRIERE-GARDE

mark Mothersbaugh's

BRAIN SPEAKS OUT

Whereas the “modern” sensibility envisions a future of ever-greater human freedom and understanding brought about by political, scientific, and aesthetic *avant-gardistes* who lead, educate, and shock us, some “post-modernists” mock these notions as harmful delusions. The concept of “de-evolution,” introduced by the postmodern “sound and vision” cultural cabal known as **DEVO**, suggests that human reliance on technology renders us increasingly dependent and dumb. Just recently, Mark Mothersbaugh of Devo showed some of his visual art at The Third Ward Gallery in Brooklyn. His show occasioned a conversation between me and Mothersbaugh on art, the culture of consumption, and the aesthetic *avant-garde* in post-modern times.

The *avant-garde* in the arts is historically rooted in the early 19th-Century financial emancipation of artists from their patrons; Beethoven had the freedom to explore dissonance in his later works whereas Mozart wrote commissioned works. Immediately, art came to occupy a place of greater personal expression and has had an enhanced potential to join the political *avant-garde* in challenging the received wisdom of the day. What, then, becomes of art and the *avant-gardiste* in 21st-Century America?

Does de-evolution turn the avant-garde on its head so that it is now the derriere-garde? In other words, in a society growing dumber, do the most mass-produced and contrived artifacts of pop culture actually contain its most advanced ideas? Under de-evolution, are commercials the most revolutionary art form? Is the way to change a society based upon consumption through a “rear-garde” action – by planting subliminal messages through the subconscious, the Freudian backdoor?

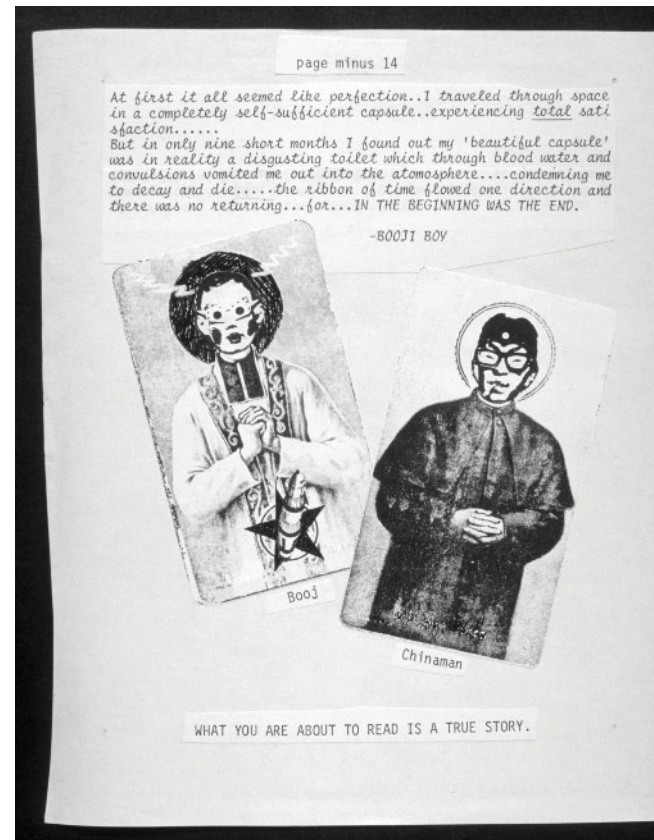
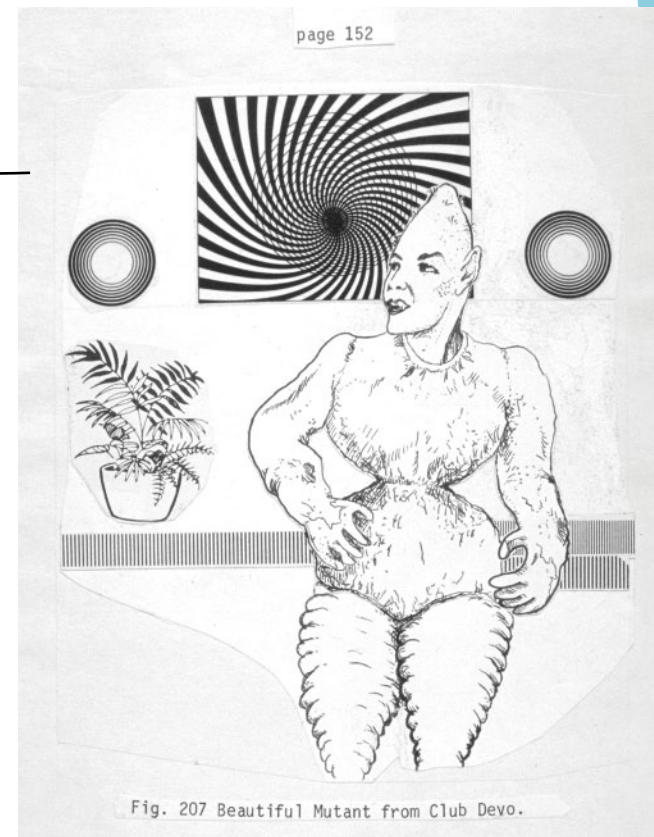


In many ways, the trajectory of Devo as a culture-producing outfit mirrors the de-evolution of our civilization. In the late 1970s, Devo exploded into the American consciousness with its perverse and dystopian juxtaposition of high technology, the detritus of advanced industrial society, and mechanistic, tongue-in-sprocket performances. Today, Mark Mothersbaugh sits atop a media empire that has manufactured music for hundreds of commercials, the scores to Wes Anderson films featuring Hollywood mega-stars, some indies, joint ventures with Disney, and relatively inexpensive prints of his prints to freak out your parents. Once shocking, Mothersbaugh’s pop sensibility is quietly becoming the norm: it’s in the winking wallpaper girding our shopping palaces, it’s plinking away in Hollywood blockbusters, and it’s in the Saturday morning cartoons whispering to our kids. Isn’t this a good thing? If we are doomed to eat “brains” to get our ideas, why not let our kids eat Mothersbaugh’s? Is the primary lesson of de-evolution that our society is now beyond the rebel-insider distinction?

Has there always been an ambivalence in the art of Devo? Does Devo turn our revulsion to living in a human factory into a form of commodity, a squirming resignation like that of the comic strip “Dilbert”? Would they have us fill our Honda scooters with Chevron gasoline and chant the mantra of those who do not remember the past: “We must repeat”? Does the meta-message of Mothersbaugh’s actual complicity with big corporations to sell their products outweigh the possible benefits of his mischievousness? Is it somehow different for people already rich and famous to “sell out”? Is it inappropriate to question our heroes?

On the other hand, do Mothersbaugh’s overtly snarky and covertly provoking commercials use the medium of commercials to shake us from their grasp? If our society is going to be full of commodities and commercials, why not make them interesting or self-destructive? Mothersbaugh tells us that “one thing we learned from the hippies and the punks is that rebellion is obsolete.” Is he ultimately right? Is assimilation into the corporate state inevitable, and, therefore, something to be embraced, like the wisdom of accepting one’s death? Does this afford an opportunity to make some cash and to act as a Trojan Horse? Are these sorts of questions and issues obsolete? Do we live in a time when we all live with some degree of complicity with evil? Who, then, is to judge? What better place to explore all this than at *Coilhouse*?

In a spirit of full disclosure, I’d like to implicate myself. I’ve long been a fan of Devo and I was so taken by his “Beautiful Mutants” series that I took one of his prints home a few years back. Am I not a man? Eat my brain, please.



DEVO

Years ago, it seemed like Devo was interested in pissing people off with its antics, its anti-macho image, its peculiar beats. Now, with your visual art, are you more interested in turning people on than pissing them off?

When I first started doing these shows, about six or seven years ago, in the particular galleries I’m showing my artwork at and at the pricepoint I’m selling my artwork at, my interest was to do a “homefront invasion” of my own. I wanted to get into people’s houses and up onto their walls. I didn’t want to send twenty-five pieces of art to Charlottesville, North Carolina and have them all come back to me a month later. I wanted them to all stay in North Carolina. That’s been my overriding goal with these shows: to disseminate the art as widely as possible.

What do you think should be the role of the artist in society? Should art disgust people, should it be a critical mirror, an escape, entertainment...? I think art should be all those things. I think in a world where everything human is denigrated, I think that art becomes more crucial and more important for people making it through their life. I think that art should be your muse, what inspires you; it can help guide you.

How would your visual art guide people? What would it guide them to do? To make good choices in their daily life. I think that the best art is inspirational.

Someone can look at your visual art and see it as very cynical.

In some ways it is. My art at its best...is just a permutation of what we did with Devo and to me Devo was about making smart decisions. It was anti-stupidity and pro-intelligence; I think that’s what we were for. We were encouraging people not to stop making sense. We always thought that “Stop Making Sense” was a ridiculous statement. You never need to stop someone from “making sense.”

Dave Thomas made a comparison between Devo and Pere Ubu, where he slaps you folks off as “cynical” and interested in selling out from the beginning through a [marketing] “strategy” of an ideology that is ultimately “vacuous, populist, and cynical.” What comparison would you make between Devo and Pere Ubu?

I like their early songs the best. If you were to call someone cynical, I think that they’d fit into that with songs like “Life Stinks.” I think that Pere Ubu just got silly after a while. I think that they lost whatever was interesting about them, and David Thomas in particular. I saw quite a few Pere Ubu shows back in 1977-1978 and I always liked a lot of things about them. I liked the way they used electronics: it wasn’t about a keyboard, but the depths of the electronic instrument. I did, one time, accidentally, get Dave Thomas upset. It seemed he didn’t have a sense of humor. We were playing the Pirate’s Cove, he played there frequently before and after Pere Ubu. Because we would play for three hours a night, we had a lot of songs, and “Jocko Homo” would take more than four minutes. “Booji Boy” would do a performance (me in a baby mask). One time I made fun of Dave Thomas. I found some cheap metallic-colored plastic – [a] weird idea for a weight loss outfit – which would make you sweat like crazy. It was a stupid gimmick

“TOIL IS USED AS THE MAIN MANIPULATOR OF HUMANS TO KEEP THEM UNDER CONTROL.”



EARLY PHOTO OF BOOJI BOY by Bobby Watson

and cost ninety-nine cents. When we played “Jocko Homo,” I stuffed it full of paper and sang it like David Thomas would have sang it. In the middle, I recited his lyrics, as if they were poetry. Afterwards he said something to us that let us know that he was angry. He voiced his dissatisfaction. There were fifteen people who saw it. He stomped out, upset. He was a little intimidated by Devo, which was what I took from it.

In some ways, both bands wanted to rile up and challenge their audience.

That’s something we brought back from Ohio with us. We were angry young men for real. Jerry Casale was at Kent State during the shootings. We had collaborated on some visual projects. What we were seeing around the world wasn’t evolution, but de-evolution. That became our kind of battle cry. We saw ourselves as reporters, giving out the “good news” of de-evolution to people.

Do you think that your art still contains a critical edge?

Yeah, I think that I can trace it back to everything I did with Devo. In some ways, it’s wider than it was, because when you get older, you get wiser. As you get older, you’ve tried more things.

How are you challenging your audience through your visual art?

I think that my art is not for everybody’s taste. It’s the kind of imagery that oftentimes you have to decide if you want to keep it on the wall when mom and dad come to visit you at college. I let gallery owners go on my website and pick things. The grid works are like stories, somewhat autobiographical social fairytales. People need more than just big-eyed....I like the show. You didn’t like the show?

I liked your show. It’s a question of whether you are giving people what they want now or if you are still trying to challenge them.

I don’t know. I know that some people want to own something. I think there is content there.

I’m asking you about your relationship with your audience. Devo was a very challenging way of what it meant to be a musician: it was very anti-rock, it had a critique of industrial society and consumer culture. Is it possible to still be challenging or *avant-garde* today?

I think that if you really want to get arrested, it would take two seconds today. I think that there is a tighter lid on culture than when I was a kid. I think that all that you have to do is go to the airport and say the wrong thing and you’ll find yourself down on your knees with handcuffs behind your back.

“WE WERE MUSICAL REPORTERS, SAYING, ‘WAIT A MINUTE. DO YOU SEE WHAT’S GOING ON? DO YOU SEE WHAT YOU ARE A PART OF?’”

Sure, but that doesn’t strike me as being fine art.

What strikes you as being fine art? I’ve had people at my shows come up to me and get upset because they saw an image of someone in a hood. I did a whole bunch of them that all involved things that were in the news.

What do you find inspiring?

I like Peter McCarthy a lot. I like a lot of things that Jeff Koons has done, even though he pisses me off.

Pisses you off in a good way?

I think so.

Devo seems to contain a critique of consumer culture, and yet you’ve gone on to score more than a hundred commercials, including some products, like “Hawaiian Punch,” that you, yourself, think is just a lousy way of selling sugar to kids. How do you reconcile the two? Are there any products that you wouldn’t sell?

There have been products that I haven’t sold and there have been products that repulsed me and I took the job because I enjoyed the subversion of putting subliminal messages into TV commercials.

Wouldn’t that put you at a lot of legal risk?

I did 120 commercials last year and the same amount the year before. A hundred commercials doesn’t even touch it.

Do you feel uneasy about making your art into a way to sell products like “Chevron”?

No, not really. It has to do with my attraction and revulsion to commercials. Some people have mental capacity where they are easily influenced by TV commercials. I think that TV commercials are probably a lot less influential on people than advertising agencies would like you to believe. I think that most people are smart enough to make decisions for themselves.

Even in the Bush era, you think people are so discerning?

Some people are inherently stupid. I think that a lot of people give up just out of exhaustion. They get tired of fighting. Toil is used as the main manipulator of humans to keep them under control. They keep you

working like a dog just to make ends meet. No matter what economic level you’re at, people buy into this Pavlovian hypnosis that they need more.

If they are buying into this “Pavlovian hypnosis,” then advertising would be very effective. They’ve done studies. Why are they spending so much money on advertising?

I think that advertising is from religion and school and from our government. It’s from everywhere else. Commercials are where things can be like oil on the back of the neck and burst open. As an art form, what drew me to commercials in the first place was an interest in the “pop” artists of the ‘60s. When I was growing up. I remember Andy Warhol, and even though he didn’t do the most incredibly crafted pieces, he got to work in film, in photography, as a print maker, a fashion designer, he got to work with the Velvet Underground, and he threw the best parties in Manhattan. I like the idea of technology, rather than as something to revere, as tools to an end, to help see an idea come into form, if technology was just there to be used.

I thought the idea is that technology is making us stupid, that technology is not neutral.

Well, that’s true, too, but I don’t think that technology makes you stupid. You can let it have its way with you. If you want to sit in front of a TV all day or stare at a video game, you have to suffer the consequences of that. It’s like anything. You are ultimately responsible for the food you eat or the paths you take in life. As far as technology, at its best, it’s something you can use to make your life better. The reality is that humans come from a long line of brain eating apes that make it easy for us to create things like atomic weapons.

Maybe that’s what we need to do now – eat more brains?

We are probably eating the wrong kind of brains all the time. That’s what I’m concerned about.

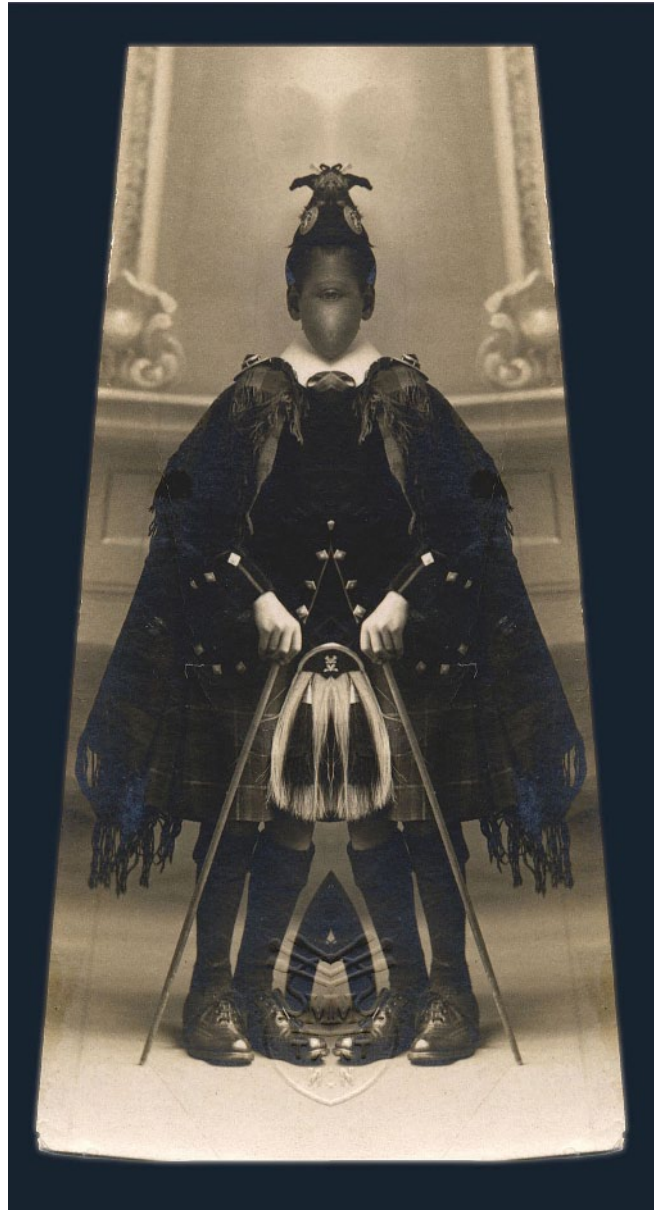


MARK MOTHERSBAUGH TODAY

How are you feeding people better brains?

I think that if you influence someone through your art or through your actions – anybody, not just artists – to make conscious decisions in life. We all have a lot of work to do. Since I was a kid, I’ve watched our country put education in the backseat, so you have kids that don’t know the name of our vice president or the capital of France and they’re graduating from high school. They don’t know how to spell properly. They write letters that read like license plates, like a list of Prince’s song titles, with the letter “u”

Before you said that you believe that commercials can act as oil on the “back of the neck” to get people to see through the various ideologies and veneers of this society. Can you give any examples? I can’t think of anything more affirming.



I don't see people believing in commercials. I see people laughing at them and making fun of them. You see people take commercials for the truth? You think anyone believes that they should listen to a little rubber lizard about what beer they should be drinking?

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I don't know. As we watch civilization crumble, I feel artists have the same duties. Artists are responsible for making people think about where they are.

I went on a double date with Andy Warhol once, but I can't say I ever knew him. Even though I've read a lot about him, I'm not sure I know what was really inside him, what he thought he was about. I only know what he inspired in me. I think that the "Balloon Dog" is an amazing work of art. Probably the first piece of art that comes to mind if I could own something that I cannot afford ... would be "Michael Jackson and Bubbles," even though I don't really like Michael Jackson very much and I'm not a fan of chimps, especially. I just love that piece of art. It made me think.

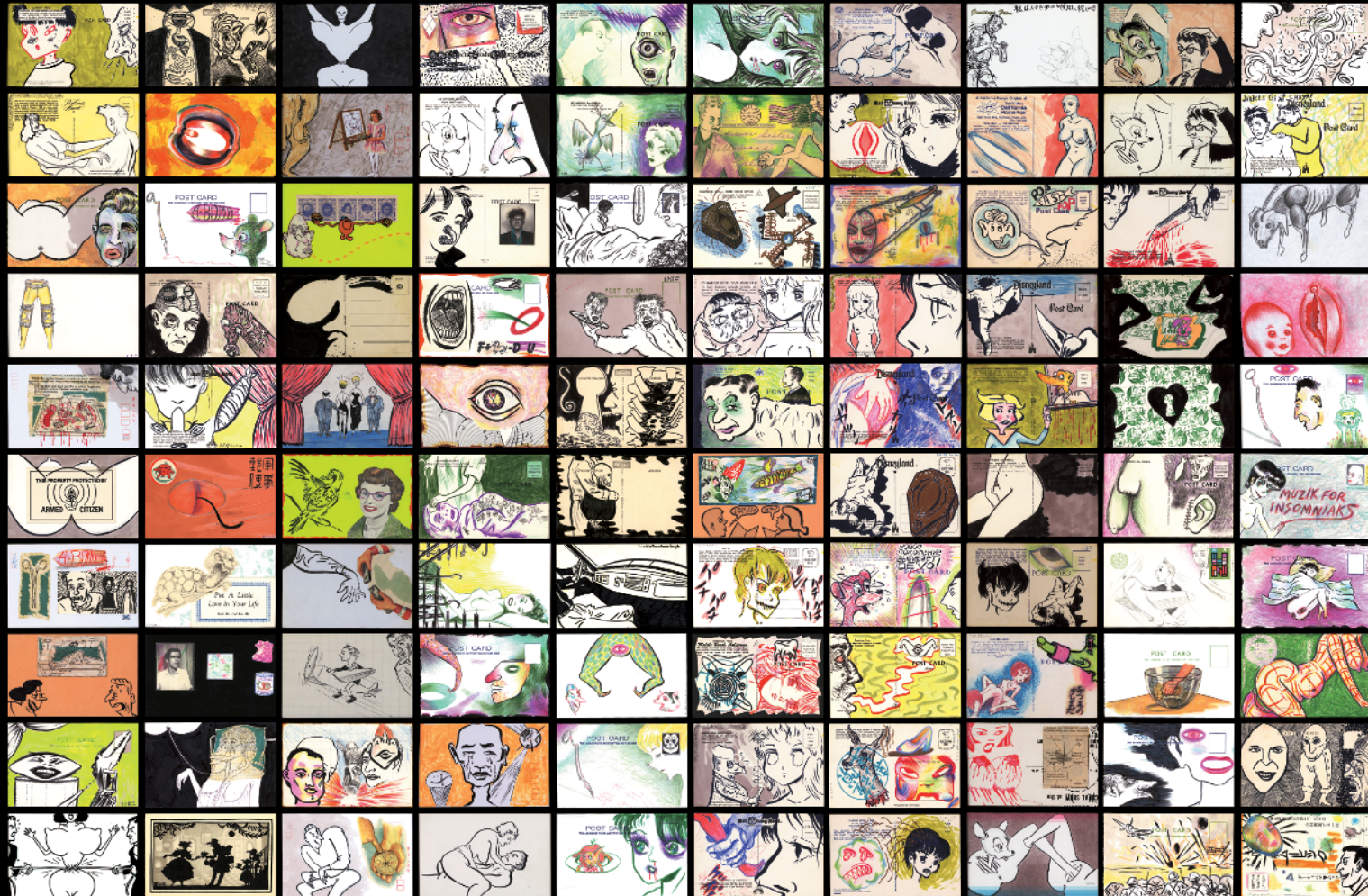
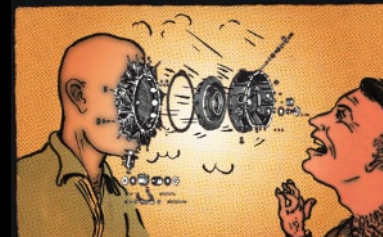
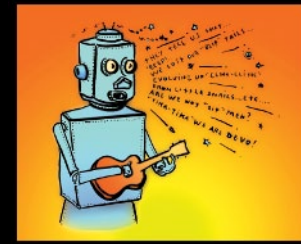
It made me think about our world, our culture – that it's insane – that the fundamentalists have a self-fulfilling apocalypse that we'll all get to join in on.



I don't think that optimism is cowardice. In some ways, I think that Devo was optimistic. We talked about De-evolution, but we always encouraged people to be anti-stupidity and to try and make a difference. We were never praising de-evolution. We were musical reporters, saying, "Wait a minute. Do you see what's going on? Do you see what you are a part of?"

"I find their 'philosophy,' i.e., what lies underneath the surface devolution material, to be vacuous, populist and cynical to a repulsive and unnecessary degree. Devo wanted a career more than anything else. We wanted anything else more than a career. They had a strategy. We found the idea of a strategy to be really small town and hick. They were a pop band. We were a folk band." Dave Thomas in Jade Dellinger and David Giffels, *Are We Not Men? We Are Devo!* (London, SAF Publishing, 2004), pp. 105-106.

COILHOUSE



Assorted pieces from Mothersbaugh's Postcard Diaries series



DARK MIRACLE

TRINITY,

THE MANHATTAN PROJECT

AND THE BIRTH OF THE ATOMIC AGE



WRITTEN BY JOSHUA ELLIS

THERE'S AN OLD STORY that in the hours before dawn on July 16th, 1945, a young woman named Georgia Green was being driven back to school at the University of New Mexico by her sister Margaret and her brother-in-law Joe. Suddenly, she saw a bright flash of light, and she gripped Joe's arm hard enough to make him swerve the car. "What's that light?" she asked.

The thing is, Georgia Green was *blind*.

At that moment, some fifty miles away, a tall, gaunt man in a porkpie hat was also staring at the light, through a pair of darkened welder's glasses. He was the architect of Georgia Green's dark miracle, and he was very, very tired – as tired, perhaps, as anyone can be and still move and breathe. It had been a long road coming out to this empty desert spot, which he called Trinity. It had been a long war.

Some of the men around him cheered. Some of them wept. A few, mostly scientists, were quietly sick in the sand beyond the dim lights of their camp. But he just stood and watched the great glowing mushroom cloud that rose in the darkness like a judgment from one angry god or another.

I am become Death, thought Robert Oppenheimer, remembering an ancient Hindu text. *I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds*.

Here are the facts: at fifteen seconds before 5:30 in the morning, Mountain Standard Time, on July 16th, 1945, the first atomic bomb was detonated, at a site code-named Trinity. It was the culmination of almost two and a half years of intensive work, done primarily by a group of scientists and engineers in a secret city roughly a hundred and fifty miles north of Trinity, called Los Alamos. The project's director was a brilliant and depressive Berkeley physicist named Robert Oppenheimer.

On August 6th, a bomb called "Little Boy" was dropped by a bomber named the *Enola Gay* on the Japanese city of Hiroshima. Three days later, another bomb – "Fat Boy" – was dropped on Nagasaki. The combined death toll is estimated to be between 100,000 and 220,000 people, possibly much higher if later deaths from radiation exposure are counted. Almost all of the casualties were civilian.

The bombings had replaced Operation Downfall, a planned invasion by Allied forces of Japan. Estimates by the American Secretary of War suggested that such an invasion would most likely result in as many as fourteen million casualties – most of them Japanese. This was the justification for the bombings; horrible as they were, it was felt by many in the Allied chain of command that the alternative was far worse. The use of atomic bombs, they were sure, would cause the Japanese Emperor Hirohito to surrender.

They were right. On August 14, 1945, Hirohito surrendered to the Allies, ending World War II – a war which had caused an estimated sixty-two million deaths in fifty-one countries around the world.

Immediately after the bombing, many of the scientists involved in the Manhattan Project – including Oppenheimer himself – urged American President Harry Truman to share the bomb with the world, giving control of atomic weapons to a transnational organization of some kind, to prevent any one nation from using atomic weapons.

Truman demurred ... but unbeknownst to him, a spy at Los Alamos named Klaus Fuchs had already given detailed plans for the Trinity bomb to the Soviet Union.

And so the Cold War began.

The Manhattan Project and Trinity have become one of the most powerful of modern fables: a reworking of the ancient myth of Prometheus,

stealing fire from the gods and bringing it to humanity; a parable of human morality and its ambiguities. It's a part of the legend of the American Dream, where a bunch of immigrants from storm-tossed shores come to these vast, open lands and apply good old-fashioned American pioneer spirit to the cause of saving the world from fascism. And it's also part of the American Nightmare – the beginning of the Cold War, the beginning of air-raid drills and Civil Defense newsreels and ducking and covering and knowing where the nearest fallout shelter is. Since that morning in the empty desert of central New Mexico, every living thing on the planet has lived in the shadow of Oppenheimer's bomb.

I've been fascinated by the Manhattan Project since I was a little boy. Growing up in the 1980s, I was part of the last generation of Cold War children. We still lived, as our parents and grandparents had, with the terrible fear that the Soviets in their madness would drop the bomb on some unsuspecting American city, like New York or Los Angeles or Chicago ... or my own hometown of Dallas.

I can't remember where I first read about Oppenheimer and his elite cadre of physicists, toiling in the high desert air outside of Santa Fe, but I remember asking myself the question which, more than anything, lies at the center of the myth of the Manhattan Project: *why did they do it?*

I moved to Las Vegas, Nevada in 1998, and found myself in another atomic city. The Mercury test site, where most of the atomic testing done in the continental United States took place – is only 90 miles north of the city, and there are still old folks around in Vegas who remember sitting on the rooftops of the casinos in the 1950s and watching the mushroom clouds rise above the mountains.

So when I discovered that Trinity site is open to the public twice a year, on the first Saturday in April and in October – I decided that it was time to make my pilgrimage, to visit Los Alamos and Trinity, and maybe try to answer that question that has bothered me for more than half my life.

Why?

"THE JEALOUSY OF LESSER MEN, AND OPPENHEIMER'S ARROGANCE AND LIFELONG REFUSAL TO SUFFER FOOLS, COST HIM DEARLY."

It's about a 12 hour drive from Las Vegas to Los Alamos, across the Hoover Dam, through Kingman and Flagstaff and Winona and Gallup and Albuquerque and a whole lot of emptiness in between. I rented an inexpensive Chrysler Sebring convertible from Avis, put the top down, and headed out of Vegas on Thursday afternoon.

When I told my friends where I was going, a few of them blinked at me. "Be careful," they said. "That's, like, *The Hills Have Eyes* territory." I promised to pack at least a machete, somewhere in the car.

I giggled at the thought as I drove across the barren landscape between the Dam and Kingman, where the I-93 meets up with the I-40. How many B-movies have been made over the years that used the horrors of the Bomb as their motif? The original *The Hills Have Eyes*, the sequel and the remake (which is still in theaters at the time of this writing); *Attack Of The 50-Foot Woman*; *The Beast of Yucca Flats*; *Horror At Party Beach*; *It Came From Outer Space*; hundreds more, most of them forgotten. The Internet Movie Database lists 58 films with the word "atomic" in their title, 54 with the word "mutant" and 41 with the word "nuclear". And those are just the ones that put the terror right out front on the marquee.

The Bomb was something new and different – it wasn't just a bigger, badder version of existing munitions, a souped-up version of a hand grenade or the bombs that were dropped on London and Dresden. Horrible as WWI was, nobody ever made a movie called *The Gatling Gun Nightmare* or *Attack Of The Mustard Gas Victims*, so far as I know.

At Kingman I turned east onto the I-40 and got comfortable; I was going to be on the freeway for almost 450 miles, until I hit Albuquerque sometime in the middle of the night. I stopped for a burger and a Coke in

a town called Seligman, about fifty miles from Kingman, in a place called the Roadkill Cafe (“You kill ‘em, we grill ‘em”). Seligman, I was informed by a plaque at the edge of town, was the birthplace of Route 66, that fabled highway that runs from Chicago to Los Angeles. (“Flagstaff, Arizona, don’t forget Winona, Kingman, Barstow and San Bernadino”, as the old song goes.)

“So how is Seligman the birthplace of Route 66?” I asked my waitress as I paid my bill. “If it runs from Chicago to LA, I mean.”

“You know, I’m not sure,” she said. “I think they started building it here.”

“Oh, like, they started here and worked in both directions?”

“I think so,” she said. “I don’t really know.”

In stopping at Seligman, I discovered that Arizona was much colder than Nevada, so I reluctantly put the top back on the convertible and headed out, the sun setting behind me.

Los Alamos the city did not exist before 1943. Before then, it was the Los Alamos Ranch School, founded by a man named Ashley Pond in 1917, a place for pampered wealthy boys from the East to come and learn how to hunt and fish and ride – to be men, in other words, by the standards of the day. William S. Burroughs attended the Ranch School, and so did Gore Vidal.

Oppenheimer, contrary to legend, did not, though his family owned a ranch nearby. When General Leslie Groves, the Project’s military liaison, was looking for a location in which to build the bomb – someplace isolated, with temperate weather and ready supplies of water and local workers – Oppenheimer thought of the Ranch School, and suggested that the Army ought to buy it. They did, and the last class of the Los Alamos Ranch School left in the early winter of 1943.

If you were one of the scientists and engineers invited to join the Manhattan Project, you took a train out West to the tiny town of Lamy, New Mexico, the nearest train stop to Santa Fe. Upon reaching Santa Fe, you went directly to the Project’s nondescript office at 109 East Palace Avenue, where a kindly woman named Dorothy McKibben (nominally Oppenheimer’s secretary) would make arrangements for your transportation and security clearance.

You would then drive (or be driven) fifty miles out of Santa Fe, into the high desert, along twisting roads that were muddy in winter and dusty in summer. Finally, after a few hours, you would reach a security gate, where you would display your new credentials to a guard. And then, you were in Los Alamos.

These days, it’s a bit easier: you simply take I-25 from Albuquerque north to Santa Fe, where you get on US 84/285 headed almost due north. When you reach the tiny town of Pojoaque, you turn left onto NM 502, a road which narrows quickly as you head up the mesa, twisting and turning until finally, you come across the town.

It is almost as surprising a place now as it was back then. Modern Los Alamos is a thriving small city of almost 20,000 people that resembles nothing so much as a Northern California college town that has been express-shipped to the middle of nowhere in the Jemez Mountains. The Manhattan Project became the Los Alamos National Laboratory in 1947, and the town became demilitarized in the 1950s.

The architecture is an odd blend of 1950s Norman Rockwell and millennial modernism, due mostly to a devastating fire in 2000 that left more than 400 families homeless. Many of the houses date from the original

Manhattan Project – prefab duplexes and quad-plexes that have been extensively retrofitted by various owners over the years. It is easy, looking at some of these houses, to imagine physicists such as Oppenheimer and Hans Bethe or Edward Teller or Leo Szilard sitting on their porches, discussing different approaches to building the Gadget, as they called it.

It is an odd little place – beautiful, to be sure, but it seems devoid of the sort of small-town closeness that other small American cities like it possess, where everybody knows everybody else. There seem to be a lot of strangers living next to one another in Los Alamos.

The h2g2 website’s entry on Los Alamos contains this amusing anecdote:

A theory believed by many of the New Age adherents in nearby Santa Fe is that the karmic effect of the [original Ranch] school and the school’s closing ensures that no intimate relations between human beings ever take place within the town’s limits. The town’s population of children is not sufficient evidence to refute this theory. In short, if you plan to stay here a while, either come married, and with your spouse, or plan to do a lot of reading, hiking, and visiting nearby towns.

There is only one bar in Los Alamos that keeps regular hours, the Canyon Bar and Grill. It gets busy on Thursdays, according to DeeDee the bartender: Thursday is karaoke night. “And not even *good* karaoke,” she tells

me, horrified. There are two other bars – Trinity Beverage and the VFW hall – but they close early. In fact, *everything* in Los Alamos closes

early. The only businesses apparently open after 8 p.m. are the Smith’s supermarket and a Sonic drive-in restaurant.

This runs completely counter to the sociological norm in small, isolated American towns, where there are usually more bars than gas stations and you can almost always find at least one 24 hour diner. But everyone I talked to in Los Alamos told me the same thing – the locals do their drinking at home.

“If you get a DUI, you lose your security clearance,” Chuck tells me. Chuck’s a tall, affable cat with a passing resemblance to an older, grayer Penn Jillette. He’s worked at the lab for five years or so; before that, he worked for DuPont chemicals doing modeling and simulation. He and his wife Sally are playing pool. “So there’s a lot of closet drinkers here.”

I suspect that the cause of most of the weird vibes in Los Alamos is, of course, the Lab itself. Since almost everyone in town is either employed by the Lab or owes their livelihood directly to it, you end up with a majority of citizens who live in a constant, low-level state of paranoia, particularly in the wake of the security scares that have made national news over the last few years. Nobody talks about what they do for a living, and nobody asks. The general feeling towards the Lab in town seems to be a sort of amused irritation, the same as you’d get in any company town, from Detroit to Las Vegas. But almost everybody, deep down, loves the Lab.

Everybody, that is, except for Ed Grothus.

Ed Grothus came to Los Alamos in 1949 to work as a machinist. He soon moved over to a weapons group, working to reduce the size of nuclear bombs while increasing the explosive yield.

A year after serving as an alternate delegate for Eugene McCarthy at the Democratic National Convention in 1968, at the height of the Vietnam War, Ed left the Lab. “I’ve lost all my faith,” he says, “not only in the bombs but the schemes and dreams of nuclear power.”

These days, Ed runs the Black Hole, a massive surplus store/junkyard/museum/monument near the edge of town, at the foot of Jemez Mountain. It fills a converted Piggly-Wiggly supermarket, a church, the parking lot between them, and as much of Ed’s house as his wife will allow.

In a surreal town, the Black Hole is the most surreal spot. A sign outside reads BLACK HOLE MUSEUM OF NUCLEAR WASTE. The parking lot is full of old desks, rackmounts for electronic equipment, filing cabinets, chairs, even a (presumably decommissioned) missile or three. A small display shows Ed’s plans for a ‘Doomsday Monument’ of two obelisks, commemorating all the deaths from atomic power over the years.

To go inside the Black Hole, you pass through an old military security gate, and you are greeted by the ticking sound of a Geiger counter, marking off the background radiation. This may prepare you for what you see.

Imagine ... well, imagine an old supermarket, filled from wall to wall and nearly to the ceiling with the collected ephemera of six decades of Big Science. The shelves hold everything from micrometers and Dewar flasks and centrifuges to burned-out lasers and aging Macintosh desktop computers and Dictaphones and camera tripods and bins of screws, bulbs and obscure forms of electronic cabling, ion chambers and Geiger counters and molded chairs and capacitors and televisions and radiation warning systems. In one far corner sits a fermentor, a device which can be used – according to Ed – to make chemical weapons. “In a fermentor like this, you can make up to fifty liters of anthrax, and those other biological bad things,” Ed told me.

“They’ve been looking all over Iraq for one of these, but they can’t find it ... because I let Saddam Hussein hide right here in the Black Hole,” he says, straightfaced. I laugh. “Bush has now shown an interest,” he continues. “He wants to buy it, smuggle it back into Iraq, they’ll find it” – he throws his arms wide – “and justify their war. He can do all that for \$50,000. Even I have a price.”

Ed’s had his run-ins with the law. For Christmas, 1996, he sent a can marked ORGANIC PLUTONIUM to then-President Clinton. “In my cover letter, I said ‘If you eat this, you’ll walk with a halo,’” says Ed. “‘If you feed some to Socks [Clinton’s cat], the cat’ll walk with a halo.’” The Secret Service was not amused, and – as Ed commemorates in a newspaper clipping he proudly displays near his front desk – they showed up to “see if there was any insanity in my family.”

Eight years later, the FBI showed up to confiscate a hard drive, some magnetic tape and printed stickers marked ‘Secret’ that Ed had on display. It turned out that the items were one of Ed’s little private jokes – he’d written ‘Secret’ on the items himself as a joke.

Once again, the Feds were not amused.

Every August, Ed stands downtown with an American flag and a banner that reads WE ARE SORRY FOR HIROSHIMA AND NAGASAKI. It’s not a widely-shared sentiment in this city of bombmakers; sometimes Lab workers show up with signs that read NO WE’RE NOT, ED, and sometimes passers-by yell and swear at Ed. This may, in fact, be the only place that I’ve ever heard anyone express the opinion that nuclear bombs are a good thing.

In 2004, Ed was joined by a group of between three to four hundred peace activists, including a Nagasaki survivor and actor/activist Martin Sheen, who was arrested along with 70 other protestors for trespassing on Laboratory property. (They marched to the gates.)

Ed is getting up in years and is rather hard-of-hearing; he has a posse of cronies who help him organize and run the Black Hole on a volunteer basis. They sit outside the place and talk about the sort of things that old men talk about: the weather, local politics, thermonuclear war and its discontents, the tensile strength of various metal alloys. One of them told me that the city has been trying to shut the Black Hole down for years, on whatever grounds they can – fire safety, pollution, whatever. But the Black Hole stays open. It has become as much a part of Los Alamos, in some ways, as the Lab itself; it is the Lab’s polar opposite.

“I point to the sun,” Ed tells me as I record a video clip for my website. “That’s the only good nuclear reaction around. The site is ideal at ninety-three million miles, the power output is essentially infinite, and the power distribution is everywhere.

“We’ll survive on this planet ... if we learn to live with the output of that power supply.”

There are two ways to reach Trinity from Los Alamos; you can go out the easy way, which is the reverse of what I’ve already described ... or you can go the hard way.

The hard way runs south, over a bridge and past the Laboratory (which is off limits to everyone, and particularly journalists, thank you very much) and up the side of Jemez Mountain on a narrow, twisty two-lane road that takes constant switchbacks up the steep slope.

Beyond lies the Valles Caldera, one of the

largest inactive volcano craters on the planet. On the first day of April, it is still snowing lightly in the Caldera as you come over the crested edge; it stretches away for miles of rolling fields and forests. It is easily one of the most beautiful places I've ever been in my life.

Beyond the Caldera is San Diego canyon, which winds through the Jemez Native American reservation. As my altitude drops the snow turned to a gentle pattering rain that kept up with me through the town of San Ysidro, onto the 550, through Albuquerque and down the I-25 towards Trinity.

It's about a hundred miles from Albuquerque to Exit 139, which leads off through the tiny town of San Antonio towards the Trinity Site. Trinity is located on the grounds of the White Sands Missile Range, which covers an improbably large chunk of central New Mexico. It is empty, desolate territory, full of sand devils kicked up by the high winds.

About fifteen miles from the freeway, there is a small road headed south, next to which is a plaque commemorating Trinity. But you are not there yet; this road leads to the Stallion Gate entrance to White Sands.

This is the Jornada del Muerto, the "journey of death" as Spanish explorers called it, a wide empty valley full of nothing but dust and sunlight. There are mountains all around, but they are far away.

I'm surprised by the huge number of cars heading out to Trinity – families in Winnebago, goth kids in a van, tourists with license plates from all over America. One by one the cars pass through the security checkpoint, about fourteen miles further down the road from the turnoff, where an armed military policeman asks for ID and checked each car for alcohol and weapons. (I don't mention the hand ax I have in my backpack in the trunk of the convertible. After all, this is *The Hills Have Eyes* territory.) The policeman advises me not to take any pictures until I reach Trinity itself, and waves me on.

Not that there's much to take pictures of. A water tower painted with orange and white stripes; a few temporary canvas buildings that look like they had long passed the temporary stage; a geodesic dome; a few small dirt roads leading off into the desert, labeled with odd signs like MARTHA and ZUMA, guarded by soldiers with four-wheeled ATVs and M-16s, to keep the hapless tourists from wandering onto Secret Government Territory.

I turn on my CD player and Johnny Cash's "Ring Of Fire" comes on, unexpectedly; I'd forgotten that I'd burned it on my mix CD. I chuckle and crank it up, slapping the door of the car to its chugging rhythm and cheery horns.

*I fell into a burning ring of fire
I went down, down, down
And the flames went higher
And it burned, burned, burned
The ring of fire
The ring of fire*

And finally, after another five miles, a soldier blocking the road in an SUV and pointing the caravan of sightseers off to the left, where a makeshift parking lot is set up.

Welcome to Trinity.

The caravan carrying the Gadget left Los Alamos a minute past midnight on the 13th – two years, three months and thirteen days after the Manhattan Project began. It took nearly eight hours to travel the 175 miles or so to Trinity from Los Alamos; the roads were rocky and the package sensitive, to say the least. When it arrived, it was immediately taken to the nearby McDonald ranch

house for assembly. Or rather, almost immediately – the driver demanded that Groves's deputy, Brigadier General Thomas Farrell, sign a receipt for the plutonium, which was, after all, all of the plutonium in the world. It was worth approximately a billion dollars in the currency of the time.

The government had appropriated the ranch from George McDonald as part of the Alamogordo Bombing and Gunnery Range (which eventually became part of White Sands) and it was swarming with soldiers and scientists. It was dusty and windy, and hot, much hotter than Los Alamos – as the scientists discovered when they tried to insert the core into the bomb housing. It stuck. Luckily, it was simply due to heat expansion, and after they let the temperature of the parts equalize, it slipped perfectly into place. Afterwards, the men went swimming in the water tank east of the ranch house.

The next morning, the bomb was lifted to the top of a 100 foot steel tower which had been assembled at the actual site, two miles south of the ranch house. The detonators were attached. The Gadget was ready to go.

As Ed Grothus will tell you, an atomic bomb looks like a soccer ball. The central core of the bomb is made of a radioactive metal such as plutonium or uranium that's constantly sending off alpha particles. Around it are placed hexagonal and pentagonal explosive charges that look like the faces of a soccer ball.

To detonate the bomb, these charges are simultaneously set off. The key word, here, is *simultaneously*; in order to work, the charges have to detonate within a few hundred millionths of a second of one another. Designing the charges and the detonation mechanism were two of the major achievements of the Manhattan Project.

When the charges are detonated, they compress the radioactive core very fast and very hard, which causes it to become smaller and denser – more massive, in other words. Past a certain point, this causes a chain reaction, in which the nucleus of the plutonium atoms begin to split. This releases massive amounts of both gamma radiation and kinetic energy in a matter of milliseconds.

In other words, a nuclear explosion.

All the way up to the actual test, there were problems – problems with the wiring, problems with the detonators, problems with everything. No one was quite sure that it was going to work.

On the 15th, the spectators and project leaders began to arrive in earnest – Oppenheimer, Groves, others. VIPs were stationed at Compania Hill, 20 miles northeast of the site, while others like Groves watched from base camp, ten miles southwest. Oppenheimer and other key scientists were stationed in wooden bunkers 10,000 yard from Ground Zero.

The weather turned bad late in the day; a thunderstorm came in. There were already teams ready to evacuate nearby towns and settlements, and Groves had called the governor of New Mexico to authorize evacuating the entire state if things got strange; it was feared that the thunderstorm might carry fallout as far as Albuquerque, and the test was postponed from the original time of 4 a.m. to 5:30 a.m.

Oppenheimer was already quite understandably high strung, and the delay and possibility of cancellation put him right on the razor's edge. The

fact that several of the scientists started taking bets on the actual explosive yield of the bomb probably didn't help. Edward Teller believed that it would exceed 40 kilotons, and the Italian physicist Enrico Fermi was heard to take bets that the gadget would start a chain reaction that would ignite all of the oxygen in the atmosphere, burning the whole planet like a cinder. Another physicist is reported to have wondered if the explosion would ever stop; if we would simply have a tiny small sun sitting out in the middle of the New Mexico desert until the end of the world.

They didn't know. They couldn't know. No one had ever done anything like this in the history of the human race. Their guesses were educated ones, but they were guesses nonetheless.

At around 5 o'clock, the weather cleared. At ten after five, the countdown began. Oppenheimer must have been chain-smoking like a madman.

At 5:29 precisely, a scientist named Joe McKibben (no relation to Oppenheimer's secretary Dorothy) threw the switch that started the precision timer at Ground Zero.

Forty-five seconds later, Georgia Green saw the light.

[The] whole country was lighted by a searing light with the intensity many times that of the midday sun. It was golden, purple, violet, gray and blue. It lighted every peak, crevasse and ridge of the nearby mountain range with a clarity and beauty that cannot be described but must be seen to be imagined. Seconds after the explosion came first the air blast pressing hard against the people, to be followed almost immediately by the strong, sustained awesome roar that warned of doomsday and made us feel we puny things were blasphemous to dare tamper with the forces heretofore reserved for the Almighty.

–Thomas Farrell

There is not much left of that early morning in the Jornada del Muerto anymore. Two small bits of concrete and rebar mark all that is left of the giant tower upon which the bomb was placed; the rest was almost instantly vaporized by the blast. The crater was filled in many years ago, and now it's no more than a slight depression, surrounded by two chain-link fences.

A makeshift parking lot sits nearby, presumably for visiting VIPs and for the two days a year that the public is allowed in this place. On those days, vendors sell books and t-shirts and hot-dogs and Cokes to the visiting crowd; at a small booth between the two fences, White Sands PR people show off various radioactive substances such as spent nuclear power balls, packs of cigarettes (all tobacco is radioactive now, due to the plant's absorption of the polonium released into the atmosphere by sixty-odd years of testing and accidents), and bits of trinitite, the shiny green glassy mineral that was created when the bomb fused the sand of the desert. It is a federal crime, apparently, to take trinitite from Trinity, though it can be purchased in nearby towns and on eBay. It is still radioactive, as is Trinity itself, though it's not especially dangerous. You get more radiation smoking a pack of Marlboros.

The McDonald ranch house is still there, two miles away; school buses take tourists there from the parking lot. Though it fell into decay after the test, it has been restored, and looks as it did on that day, down to the handpainted signs by Oppenheimer on the doors leading into the plutonium assembly room, warning oblivious soldiers not to wipe their feet and to keep the place as clean as possible.

Today, someone has placed the rotting skull of a small bird or rodent very carefully on the adobe wall behind the ranch house. Perhaps it's some sort of offering in this place of death; maybe it's just some weird kid's idea of a joke. I don't know, and never will.

I file along with the rest of the tourists, snap my pictures, get back on the bus to the parking lot. I've taken a bunch of video of myself at Ground Zero, but when I get home the next day I discover that the relentless wind of the Jornada del Muerto has left me with nothing more than footage of a long-haired overweight man in a cowboy hat pantomiming over the modulated bass rumble of the desert wind.

And then it's time to go; the soldiers are about to start herding people out, and I've seen what I need to see. I throw the cameras in the trunk and get back in the convertible for the long drive back to the highway, and back to Las Vegas.

I still don't have the answer to my question – why – but maybe I understand a little bit more than I did. Ed Grothus helped me, and Richard Rhodes, whose *The Making Of The Atomic Bomb* was my guidebook.

Maybe they did it because they were afraid – afraid of Hitler, afraid of losing the war. And maybe they did it because the science was so exciting, and the opportunity to be surrounded by so many fine minds in a place where there was nothing to do but talk about the science.

Ultimately, I think, they did it because it could be done, which is why anyone really ever does anything important. In that impulse are the seeds of both humanity's potential for survival and our potential for destruction. And they lived with it, all of them, the knowledge of what they'd brought into the world. At the end of Jon Else's 1980 documentary *The Day After Trinity*, a black and white camera focuses closely on Robert Oppenheimer's face, many years after Trinity, as he describes the moments afterwards. His hair is white and his face is seamed with age, but his eyes are still as mesmerizing as ever. Like his voice, quiet and halting, there is something in them – a guilt, perhaps, that no other human would ever feel or really understand.

"We knew the world would not be the same. Few people laughed. Few people cried. Most people were silent. I remembered the line from the Hindu scripture, the *Bhagavad-Gita*..."

His voice almost breaks, and he wipes his eye.

"Vishnu is trying to persuade the prince that he should do his duty. And to impress him, takes on his multi-armed form, and says 'Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds.'

"I suppose we all felt that, one way or another."

Georgia Green died in the mid-1980s. Trinity was the last bright light she ever saw.

After the war, Oppenheimer was, for a time, the chairman of the General Advisory Committee of the Atomic Energy Commission, and he also became the director of the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton.

But the jealousy of lesser men, and Oppenheimer's arrogance and lifelong refusal to suffer fools, cost him dearly. In 1953, he was accused by envious colleagues on the AEC of being a Communist sympathizer and a security risk. Thanks in part to a betrayal by Edward Teller, his former friend and colleague, he was publicly humiliated and stripped of his security credentials. His involvement in the making of policy concerning his Gadget was over.

He died of throat cancer in 1964, a man who had lived like a wounded and betrayed animal for the last decade of his life, and his ashes were spread over the U.S. Virgin Islands in the Caribbean.

It was a place that he loved.

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ILLUSTRATION Zoetica Ebb

Supple leather, screws, stitches, buttons, gears, springs – Belgian artist Stéphane Halleux's work is so meticulously detailed, so gleaming and solid, it begs to be touched. In his world, enhanced robo-dogs, gas-masked soldiers and sinister wheelchair-bound fellows all chug along in a rhythm of mechanical prosperity. The work is elevated not only by Halleux's remarkable skill and imagination, but by the feisty personality that seems to radiate from each sculpture. Every piece seems infused with vigor, just moments away from springing into action. Once inspired by the antiquated interior of a second-hand store, Halleux is now an avid collector of potentially useful items. He theorizes that using old objects to build new ones gives his creatures a past, and therefore, a life. Halleux lives with his family in France where he continues to create in no less than three studios. Each of his workshops, like each sculpture, has an exacting purpose of its own.

Do you remember your first sculpture and what pushed you to build it? Is it still in your possession?

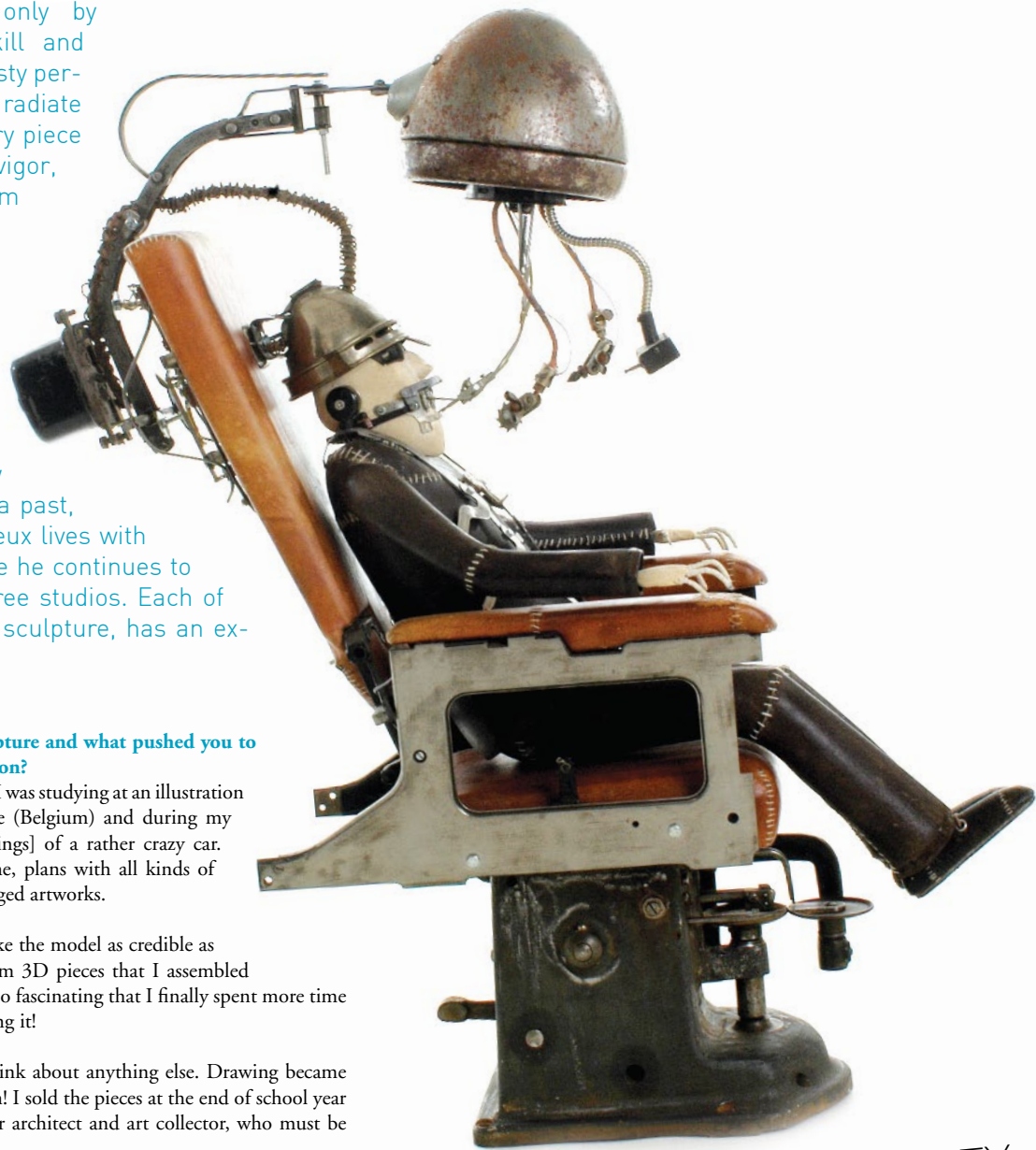
I remember my first piece very well! I was studying at an illustration and drawing High School in Liège (Belgium) and during my last year I created [technical drawings] of a rather crazy car. I really loved drawing plans; for me, plans with all kinds of annotations and details are full-fledged artworks.

In short, to paint this plan and make the model as credible as possible, I took my inspiration from 3D pieces that I assembled especially for these sketches. It was so fascinating that I finally spent more time constructing the model than painting it!

And that's that! After, I couldn't think about anything else. Drawing became bit by bit a stage in the construction! I sold the pieces at the end of school year show for a few pence to an interior architect and art collector, who must be pleased with it now!

The work environment is such a crucial part of the creative process - could you describe your studios? I envision you working away dressed in a jumpsuit, leather apron and maybe a tool belt - any truth to that?

"In order to prevent a domestic squabble, the gallery manager gave the poor husband his money back. He went sadly away, pulled by his wife."



STÉPHANE HALLEUX'S GIZMO PARADE

I work in heaps of junk; I hoard almost everything and my workshop looks like nothing conceivable. It's like a scrapyard – piles of metal objects of all kinds, antiques or bits of antiques everywhere, attached to the walls or hanging from the ceiling, leather or suede scraps and jackets piled up on the ground waiting to be punched. There are also smashed or dismantled machines, from which I usually utilize tiny parts. A skull, jars, transparent boxes where I put the smallest pieces, stapled or pinned sketches all around (I sometimes draw directly on the walls), lots of tools (sometimes two of them, when I have to buy a new one because I'm unable to locate the old one in such a mess).

That's how my works grow up, every time as an excrescence developing and emerging from this muddle. It's as if – after a gestation period – the piece is really born after leaving the workshop! That's what makes my work environment, and, as I am not patient enough to put on something else for working, I usually wear the same clothes for going out, so my costs for t-shirts and trousers are rather high!

By the way, I love the contrast between the finished piece, lost in my workshop, and the one exhibited on an individual base in the large white space of a gallery.

Your sculptures often appear to be alive, so much so that delving into animation seems a natural progression. Do you see yourself working more in this realm?

I was recently contacted by the Laika Entertainment Studios in Portland. At the time, they were working on a stop motion feature film called *Coraline*, written and directed by Henry Selick (*Nightmare Before Christmas*, *James and the Giant Peach*). They told me about their future project *Here Be Monsters*, adapted from a novel by Alan Snow, and commissioned me to create a piece about the subject. I was very happy to be able to take part in such a cool project and moreover I was quite free in my interpretation.

Since then I have been invited to visit their studios, met the artists who are working on the project, saw the first drawings, the molded characters, all those wonderful details ... and I think I can't currently reveal much more, but I can say that it will surely be extraordinary, terrific!

It would, of course, be great to see my sculptures moving. I have already been offered some interesting scenarios, but up to this point they haven't attracted me to such an extent that I launch a project.

You already have a book filled with sculptures, and a few short stories about your characters are featured on your website. Are you interested in writing for print?

I enjoy reading and I would love to write!

But writing is a subject that requires a lot of energy and if I seriously devoted myself to it, I think I would be forced to abandon my other activities.

You've done a lot of traveling lately – what's the best place you've visited so far?

I don't intend to butter you up but it is without any doubt California! I have finally had the opportunity to meet great artists I only knew via Internet, like Nemo Gould and Greg Brotherton who I was lucky enough to exhibit with at the Device Gallery and have a wild time! I met Tim Johnson (Director at Dreamworks – *Over the Hedge*, *Fourmiz*, *Sinbad*) with whom I had already exchanged quite a lot of emails. And, of course, I met you at the exhibition and previewed your first issue. I seized the opportunity to visit the U.S. with friends and it was super, but I'll especially remember the numerous encounters with very sympathetic and interesting people. I usually don't travel this much – my sculptures travel much more than I!

Any travel anecdotes you could share?

It happened at the official opening of an exhibition in Berlin. A guy rushed towards me, very enthusiastic, to congratulate me on my work and told me he had already given a deposit for one of

"I keep almost everything and my workshop looks like nothing conceivable. It's like a scrapyard – piles of metal objects of all kinds, antiques everywhere."

my pieces (an electric chair) and was going to introduce me to his wife. A short while later he came back to me pulling his wife's sleeve. He proudly showed her the piece he had just bought and she began to shout at him: "What's that horrible thing? Are you quite crazy or what...!"

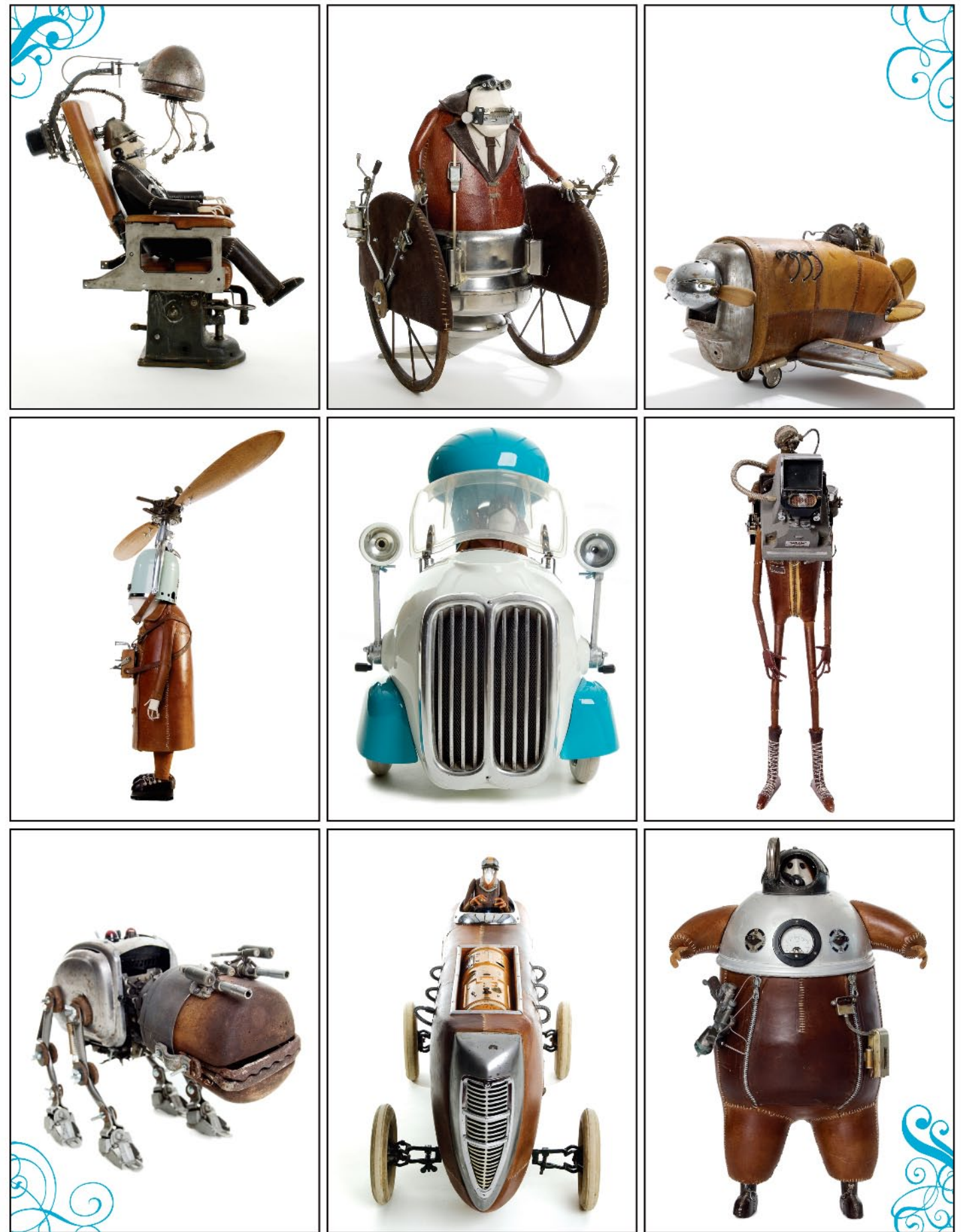
In order to prevent a domestic squabble, the gallery manager gave the poor husband his money back. He went sadly away, pulled by his wife. You see – there is no accounting for taste!

INTERVIEW Zoëta Ebb





"That's how my works grow up, every time as an excrescence developing and emerging from this muddle."





Working It & Owning It
**MARGARET CHO
& SELENE LUNA**
Warrior Beauty Queens

When we arrive at Allen Amato's photography studio in Los Angeles, the legendary comedienne Margaret Cho is sitting in the kitchen under a hot lamp, "gettin' her harr did" in preparation for our cover shoot. Oh, holy Dame Edna, does she look fierce. Trim and tattooed, clad head-to-toe in a creaking black leather Skin Graft ensemble, Margaret has been transformed into a goth warrior princess on par with Maggie Cheung as Irma Vep or Mimi Kinkade in *Night of the Demons*. A few feet away, another dainty badass cracks wise, slinging Jerry Lewis-level schtick as her war paint is applied. A tiny woman with enormous stage presence, Selene Luna is one of the LA neo-burlesque community's brightest stars, and in our opinion, its all-time loveliest.

Together, the two of them are an unstoppable dynamic duo, intent on rescuing us all from the pervading forces of blandness and callousness. Recently, the two performers – along with a faboo cast of fellow firebrands – teamed up for *The Cho Show*, Margaret's new kinda-sorta reality show for VH1. In the two interviews that follow, Margaret Cho and Selene Luna open up about their creative pursuits, their challenges and the role that family – both biological and of the diverse, extended, queer variety – has played in their lives.

Margaret Cho

Reality shows so often seem to revolve around discomfort, resentment, conflict, etc, but there's so much laughter and acceptance on your show.

We are a very diverse, very queer, very functional, very loving family, which I think is important to show. There are enough reality show train wrecks – we get enough schadenfreude in TV. I want to show something positive and beautiful and real.

How did you first approach your folks, Selene, your glam squad and the rest of the faboo cast with the idea?

Everyone was game except for my parents. They said no, then they said absolutely not, then there was a tentative maybe, then a “we’ll see.” They haven’t officially said yes yet. But now they love it. They are very, very proud.

What were some of your favorite moments from shooting?

I loved getting the anal bleaching. John Stapleton (makeup) and I were sharing one table, and we were both on all fours asses in the air getting it done together. It was so funny! I also loved going camping with the gay boys! They hated it!

The history of your last network show, *All American Girl*, is infamous at this point. Did you have any trepidation about returning to television? How has working with VH1 compared to your bitter battles with ABC?

“I THINK BEAUTY IS A DECISION.”

VH1 were great because they let us do what we wanted to do, they let us be ourselves, which was totally amazing. I really worried about returning to TV because I didn’t want to get my heart broken like before, but VH1 treated us with a huge amount of respect and had so much passion for the show, so we found ourselves in the perfect situation!

As is the case with everything you do, there’s a healthy dose of sincerity mixed in with the hi-jinks on *The Cho Show*. You speak candidly about all sorts of thorny issues. Beyond sheer entertainment value, what are you hoping to accomplish with *The Cho Show*? Are there any communities you want to reach in particular? Who do you most hope will watch it, and why?

I hope everyone watches it. I hope to reach a larger audience than I do as a standup comic. I feel like if people see images of themselves – or people like them on TV, they feel like they exist, they matter. This is a tremendously important thing – so I hope to reach Asian Americans, queers, the heavily tattooed, the feminist, the progressive – the people who matter.

Over the last few years you’ve been doing a lot of dancing and cabaret and getting tattooed... it really seems like you’ve been embracing your own physicality, adorning it, reveling in it. Running on a parallel track, your recent stand-up tour, “Beautiful” focused on sexuality and self-acceptance. When/how did you start to fully embrace your own beauty?

I started to feel way more beautiful after 35 – I thought ‘why not?’ I am going to be beautiful now – that was my plan. It all became about getting lots of tattoos and spending more time enjoying my beauty – getting real girly with makeup and wardrobe. Enjoying my femme side. I think beauty is a decision – a choice we can all make for ourselves!

Was there any particular turning point or catalyst?

Getting older, realizing that if I wanted to be a beautiful woman – I was going to have to start soon. That if I lived to be 80, then I would only have a little over half my life to work it out!

When you were a youngster, who did you look up to, and who did you think was truly beautiful?

I thought my mother was beautiful, and my aunts. I really idolized the women in my family. They were chic, elegant, self assured. And 70s fashion was the best. They would wear high high platforms and big wide bell bottoms and skinny little button down shirts. My mom even had an afro at one point! Fabulous!

Are you still doing that incredible fan dance with the “full monty” reveal at the end, and is there any film footage of it? I heard you hired a Hollywood special effects appliance guy to to make the prosthetic for it! How’d that conversation go down?

I don’t have any photos – but I know they are all over the web. BJ from The Dapper Cadaver made a mold of his very own member for me to use. I love that because it looks very real. It is definitely a grower not a shower!

I’m a hyooooooge fan of the comedians Ian Harvie and Liam Kyle Sullivan, who both happen to be good friends of yours. What’s it like to collaborate with them? Who else in the world of comedy would you recommend?

I love Ian and Liam. They are really funny and fun guys to hang out with, which is very important when you are on tour together. My favorite comic is Wanda Sykes. She is a genius, and is on *The Cho Show*, too. Also I am obsessed with *Flight of the Conchords*. Really hilarious!

What are you most looking forward to in 2009? Any big projects brewing?

Hopefully season 2 of *The Cho Show*. Then a new show for lifetime called *Drop Dead Diva*. Then I want to do an album of all comedy songs. Gonna direct some films. Should be busy.

What’s on your stereo these days?

Love, love, love the new Amanda Palmer record [and] I am obsessing on the Kills. Also, I just joined the Broken Social Scene too. I play triangle!

What’s your experience campaigning for Obama been like?

Really cool. I never endorsed or campaigned for anyone before. He is tremendously inspiring and I am thrilled and elated that he won. This is history in the making, and I’m so proud to have been able to be a part of it. The country is changing, and for the better.

On the less wonderful side of things, how do you feel about Prop 8 passing in California?

I am devastated, for a number of reasons. It means that California is far less liberal than we thought, and that the spread of homophobia and hatred has gotten out of control. I feel like I didn’t do enough, that I didn’t talk about it enough, that I didn’t donate enough money or time to this. But ultimately, this is just the beginning. This fight isn’t over, not by a *long* shot. We have a lot to do and a lot to learn from this relatively minor setback. What hurts me most is that I [presided over ceremonies and] married couples whose marriages will no longer be seen as legal and valid. This is incredibly painful, and I feel like we let those couples down. But we are going to get their rights back, because we have truth and love and fairness and equality on our side.

Any advice for all of the unconventionally beautiful people out there who are struggling with low self-image/esteem? Get tattoos. Get pierced. Modify. Enjoy!

INTERVIEW Meredith Yayanos



Selene Luna

Iranian-American actor/comedian Maz Jobrani urges Middle Eastern actors to turn down terrorist roles. Do you have similar feelings towards roles that portray little people in stereotypical way?

It's a great question for an actor – any actor – to address. When I first started pursuing this career, I was dead-set against doing any roles that I found demeaning; Christmas Elves, magical enchanted bullshit creatures, etc. Why is it OK to continue doing that with little people? But the one thing I learned is that you get to a certain point where you have to measure your commitment to this craft. Do you want to make a political statement, or do you want to be a working actor? Is it better to go work some day job that doesn't contribute to your career, or just be thankful you're paying the rent acting? So I got my head straight about that, at least for me. Before that, I kept struggling and struggling. I kept hitting brick walls because I kept refusing roles. I kept getting offered these stupid suit job roles...

Suit job roles?

A suit job is when a little person is in a costume, basically. There's no face, it's a fucking Ewok, it's ET. That's a suit job. And that's what I kept getting, and after a while, I was like, "screw it. No one can see my face, who cares? I'm getting paid more than I would working a week in an office cubicle, so why not?" For anybody across the board to get paid for acting is a privilege, whether it's a role you're into or not. It does not matter. I'm sure that the Harvard drama graduate running down the beach as an extra on Baywatch isn't thrilled either. The truth is, Hollywood discriminates against everyone.

At the same time, I want to mention that I try to balance the paying-the-rent gigs with my own personal work. Instead of actors feeling degraded and turning down roles and stupidly not paying their bills, take responsibility for your career and write your own material. Don't expect somebody to do it for you.

Tell me about your immigration experience.

I was born in Mexico. My family immigrated illegally to the states when I was 3. We crossed the border, really hardcore. But this was in the 70s, and it wasn't as serious as it is now. I think we were almost informally invited. I think there was still a shortage of dishwashers, valets and nannies; the door was left open. [In Mexico], we lived in a cinderblock house with dirt floors. And I thought that we were rich because our house was made out of cinderblock, while most of our neighbors, their houses were literally made out of cartons. It was totally that "Feed the Children" commercial. So my parents had nothing to lose. They basically brought the shirts on their backs, grabbed my siblings and jumped in the car. They told the border guard that they were taking the kids to Disneyland for the day, and never turned around. The border guard was like, "yeah, come on by, have fun!" That's how it was back then.

What was your growing up and attending school in LA like?

When we first arrived in this country, we lived in the East LA housing projects, and that was tough. Trying not to get sucked into the ghetto world. My parents made it very clear that they didn't come to this country and sacrifice everything so that we could piss it away. So even if there was no summer school, there was summer school for *us*. We were at home

doing homework that my parents invented for us. And they didn't even speak English. They learned, actually, as we studied. Eventually we moved out of East LA, my parents were able to buy a house, and by that time I'd entered high school, [where] I was pretty popular. Not traditional-popular; I wasn't the cheerleader, I wasn't dating the jock, but I was popular because I was able to change my situation into humor. I credit my father for instilling this in me, to seek attention for the right reasons. I knew from the age of four that I was going to be stared at, no matter what I did, because of my condition. I was determined to get the attention on my terms. I was the class clown, the goofball, always in trouble, always making everyone laugh. I hung out with everyone; the jocks, the cheerleaders, the cholas, the punk rockers.

Rockin' it in the burlesque scene is as much about being funny and playful as it is about being sexy. What first drew you to that world?

The humor, number one, is what drew me to it. Number two, my friends. I got involved about 11 years go. All my girlfriends were doing it for some time, and it never occurred to me that I could do it too. They were all so pretty and glamorous. I've always been a sexual individual, I just didn't feel like I was sexy in that way, you know, to justify stripping on stage. But I wanted to play with them. I wanted to hang out with my girlfriends, and that was a way to do it. They were very supportive. And that's how I got involved with Velvet Hammer, the troupe that I'm proud to say pretty much single-handedly brought about the current neo-burlesque revival.

Back then, there were no classes, nobody taught you how to do anything. If you wanted to be in it, you were on your own. You had to make your own costume. We had sewing bees – all of us would gather at one girl's house and work on our costumes. But outside of that, you were on your own. You pick your

own music, you choreograph, it's up to you to put up a three-minute production. But now, there are all these classes. "Take a class in burlesque! Learn how to be a pin-up!" All of that is fine and dandy. Spread the gospel. But it's kind of weird, because I feel like a lot of it can't be taught. A lot of it is you being willing to fall on your face. And that's was fun about it, the chance to really express yourself without a safety net.

These days, I see a lot of "neo-burlesque" girls who just look like they're just trying to be vintage-sexy without a hint of subversiveness.

Yeah, I totally see what you see. I hope I'm not misunderstood and I don't sound non-supportive of these young girls, because I think it's a great, fun thing to do, but it's so over-saturated now, I'm not even sure what they're doing. But it shouldn't even matter what I think. It does take a lot of courage to perform. Even if you're performing a piece of crap, my hat's off to you for even getting up there. You have to do the shitty shows to become an evolved, experienced performer. Burlesque has taken off like wildfire to the point where so many acts call themselves burlesque that are not burlesque in the slightest. A pair of underwear with electric tape over the boobs? Not burlesque. But who's to say which is which? As long as you're not just doing it for selfish reasons, I feel like it's justified. Also, I do want to make the point that when my "generation" of burlesque performers first started doing it, there were women who had done burlesque in the 40's and 50's who didn't like what we were doing in the early 90's at all.



When do you feel the most vulnerable? Powerful? Content?

I could have one answer for all of the above, but each of these is individually significant. I feel the most vulnerable when I'm by myself in public. Having nothing to do with showbiz. I feel vulnerable any time I leave my house. And not in a paranoid, agoraphobic kind of way. Not like that. It's just that I'm vulnerable because people don't realize – or maybe they do, I'm just making the assumption that they don't – how intimidating this world is for someone my size. It's such a physical thing. I feel vulnerable going to the supermarket. I don't buy products I can't reach. And it's not that I'm embarrassed to ask for help, it's just that my life is as loaded as anyone else's life. I don't have time to stop and track down customer service just to go get some fucking organic sugar I want. That's really when I feel most vulnerable. I feel most vulnerable when I'm pushing a giant shopping cart up and down those giant grocery aisles. That's when I'm most vulnerable, when I'm participating in daily life. Dealing with the high counters at the bank, and at the post office. That is my vulnerability. I'm living in a world that I don't fit in. And I'm not upset about it, it's OK, it's nobody's fault. This world cannot be built for every individual. That wouldn't be efficient, it just doesn't make sense. That's fine, but that's my vulnerability. I feel most powerful on stage. That's my power. Doing it on my terms. Not on film, not TV, but on stage. That's why I'm really a theater whore. I love stage because that's where I have my power. That's where I write my own material, that's where everything is on my terms, that's where I have people's attention, that's where I'm heard. Everybody wants to be heard, and that's my platform. And content... I'm most content after sex. So there you go.

Tell me about your friendship with transsexual porn star Buck Angel. Buck Angel is one of my oldest friends and my surrogate father. It's really ironic, but he's the strongest male role model in my life. We've known each other for about 15 years, and we've seen each other go through all sorts of evolutions, trying to figure out our path in lives, how to live in our own skin. One of the things he and I relate to – and I think that this is why I have a soft spot in my heart for trannies – is that I'm also trapped in a body that I didn't choose. He – beyond burlesque, beyond anything else in my life – Buck Angel is really the one who taught me self-acceptance. He himself has got most incredible life story I've ever known. The Buck Angel porn stuff is really just the tip of the iceberg. Doesn't even touch his life. As a teenager in high school, he was an Olympic-bound track star, but that didn't pan out. A lot of that had to do with his internal torture of being stuck in the wrong body. He had not transitioned yet and was dealing with all this weird shit. Then he was a high-fashion runway supermodel in the 80s, signed with Elite. He was major. Actually, he's the one who, when he was female, single-handedly started the androgynous look in the early 80s. You know that boyish Gap look? He's the one who pioneered it. And he was a beautiful, gorgeous model. You would never even guess that was him. He has a lot of pioneering qualities that have inspired me. He taught me to say, "Who cares what anyone thinks? Just do it."

What was it like working on The Cho Show?

It's the first show I've ever worked on that was a true personal passion for all parties involved, cast and crew. We all had this amazing love affair with each other. We wrapped back in May and a day doesn't go by that I don't see them or talk to them. The best part was constant riffing on each other. Whether or not the cameras were on, we were just going at each other non-stop. Everybody on this show, we're all toppers. Everyone wanted the last word and we all wanted to out-wit each other.

Who were your mentors growing up?

Growing up, I had a lot of idols. I grew up watching a lot of old-fashioned TV shows. A lot of those black-and-white movies, I thought they were current, I didn't know the difference. My parents couldn't really afford much entertainment for us kids, so what we would do, virtually every weekend, is my parents would bring us to Hollywood Boulevard and we would catch a matinee and grab pizza, which was pretty much all we could do on a budget for a family of six back then. So everything was glamorous to me; the very first movie I saw in a movie theater was The Wizard of Oz. It was for my fourth birthday, a double feature with Singing in the Rain. That, to me, was life. It was more about escapism; it was so opposite from our daily surroundings. That escapism really connected with me, that fantasy world of MGM musicals and Technicolor. I was like, "that's what

I'm gonna be, that's the world I want." I was only exposed to two things in my life: those movies, and living in the hood. I knew I didn't want to be in the projects forever, so that was kind of my choice. Anyway, my glamour influences were: Jane Russel – she was such a brunette Amazon. Lupe Velez. La Lupe – a lot of people don't know about her, but she's the ultimate badass Latin woman. She's considered the Latin queen of soul. She was really huge in the 60s. Her music's amazing. And also, Russ Meyer women. Women from pulp rags and pulp movies. I love that trash! It's just hot! These Amazon women with huge tits and big hair and spider lashes. It turned me on when I was a little kid, that was the woman I wanted to be. I wanted to be a Russ Meyer Girl... Cynthia Myers, Tura Satana, Pam Grier, those take-no-prisoners-but-at-the-same-time-I'm-a-sex-kitten badass women. I don't know about mentors, but that's what I was exposed to, and I dug it.

What's your take on LA and "LA people"?

LA is great. The people are beautiful; even if it's gross-beautiful, it's still hot. Don't get me wrong, I'm not against plastic surgery, but fake breasts, it's just not for me. Although, I love fake tans. That's why in the Cho-Universe Beauty Pageant is one of my favorites, because one of my personal fetishes that I've had for many years – my whole life – is fake tans. I love looking nuclear-bomb orange with striking blond hair and frosty makeup. A walking reverse negative. It cracks me up, I think it's really sexy and trashy. I have a personal fetish for "normal drag," dressing up like a Carmela Soprano, those types of women, the ones who don't even realize they're in drag. Looking like a "normal lady," someone with a Mystic Tan, taking S Factor pole dancing classes on the Westside, that to me is fun drag. I'm into that shit. I have horrible taste.

Tell me more about the normal drag!

I get really excited, I can't contain myself! I love doing drag. I started doing drag when I was 9. I dressed as boy. I never had any gender orientation issues, it was more about escapism. That's really what drag represents to me, and how it's helped me out and become a positive and fun force in my life. When I started doing it, I didn't even realize I was doing drag. Life was tough, and children act out in different ways. I started dressing as a boy and acting like a boy, depending on how I felt. On certain days, I would part my hair on the opposite side than I normally would, and that meant that I was a boy that day. On those days, I used to call myself Seleno. What was really cool was that my family supported it. They said "oh, she's just being wacky." And thank god that they didn't discourage it, because it let me be myself and express myself. I needed that. And now I have a lot of drag queen friends, and one thing that drag queens like to do is dress like a "normal lady." A mom. And I don't mean any disrespect to real soccer moms. I'm a tremendous fan at stay-at-home moms and dads because that's really taking responsibility, unlike a lot of breeders. My hat's off to them. I have no desire to have a family, to be a mom. I don't even want a house plant. So to me, it's the extreme. It's like when a frat boy puts on a dress and a wig and goes 'huh huh, I'm a lady!' Well, I put on a short mom wig and a turtleneck and sweats and I'm like "huh huh, I'm a soccer mom!" There's something funny and confrontational about that.

Is there anyone you want to reach in particular with The Cho Show?

It's funny, but ever since the show aired, I got slammed on MySpace by requests from tweens, kids generally from the ages of 12 to 15, which is a market I've never tapped into because I consider my material very adult. Having a MySpace page alone at that age is something to be concerned about. I'm really old-fashioned; rated R means rated R. If I'm saying cuss words, you can't watch or hear. I feel very strongly about what's appropriate for children. But I can't help it if they're watching a show when I think they should be in bed. Our show comes on at 11 for a reason. But since they have a MySpace page and they're looking at my profile, obviously supervision is limited, so the least I can do is provide a positive and enlightening outlook. Since getting all this attention from this population of kids noticing me on the Internet, I have cleaned up my MySpace page, because I do want to welcome them, I do want to provide a positive image. I get comments from kids saying "Wow, I didn't know people like you existed!" It makes me feel like I'm doing something worthwhile.

INTERVIEW Nadya Lev/Meredith Yayanos



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www.drmartens.com



TWILIGHT EQUILIBRIUM SHIFTING SHAPES WITH

STEPHEN KASNER

All of us have risen from sleep with some haunting dream image or fragmented phrase still affixed to our retinas. Often, this experience fills us with some acute but inexplicable emotion. In dreams, abstractions have a way of reaching deep inside us, prodding nerves and stirring memories. Stephen Kasner's work is like that. Over the years he has shaped his own iconography into a visual language just primitive enough to pierce completely. Most prevalent in Kasner's work are his depiction of birds. Half opened mouths signal longing, hunger, desire. Straining necks denote strength. The birds are survival, they are suffering, they are hope – creatures flickering in the fog of Kasner's universe like the gauzy remnants of dreams that cling to us long after we awake.

Do you think your, highly personal, language can evoke universal impressions?

The term *magic*, to me, relates this very idea, and I use it to describe psychic or cosmic connections and impressions. I don't think images or sounds or any other artistic medium can do this on an instantaneous grand scale, not immediately. However, it is possible to begin to effect people universally over time. It is the ripple-in-the-water effect. Like planting seeds, evocative, emotional transmissions occur between people on a more singular basis. When a large number of individuals begin to transmit similar psychic charges, this can create more of a spark, then that sparks a fire, and so forth.

It is a complicated question, and can be interpreted in numerous ways. One works in this way, say with painting, as a form of transmitter, picking up all sorts of magnetic and pulsating, sometimes dark, frightening or unknowable frequencies. When that information is assimilated using sometimes limiting media, there is always the hope, but never absolute certainty, that what you convey are lasting, meaningful impressions. Personally, I try not to let any work out that I don't feel is able to connect with people. In a similar sense, I must feel that what I am producing is precisely related to universal impressions that I feel myself and am strongly connected to. In the end result, if all these things work, it is indeed magic in the most significant manner.

In your work birds almost read like pictographs. What is their significance to you?

I use several recurring icons in my work- birds, flowers and various, sometimes semi-abstract floral shapes, butterflies, decapitated bird and human heads, disembodied hands, and tree roots mainly, but among other things. I tend to utilize extremes in my iconography of life and death. With something like the birds or butterflies or flowers, I see these elements as ultimately pure in nature. These are, to me, icons for extreme beauty; elements of the simplest forms which surround us, more often taken for granted in an ever-congested, increasingly ugly world.

Of course, these things can have varying meanings at different times. The icons I tend to use aren't concretely definable necessarily. The base of the intent, the idea, is definable but each iconography takes on lives of their own in individual pieces. It is like an ingredient; depending on what you do with that ingredient can result in infinite possibilities, some definable, more often not. Ultimately, it is up to the individual viewer to create their own definitions, if they choose to have them.

When I use grotesque imagery, it stands as opposition, but also direct contrast to beauty. It is a measurement of sorts, a balance, a weight, which helps to dignify the beauty in an odd yet necessary way. A simple analogy would be something like the idea of constant sunlight without ever experiencing night. If sunlight always existed, constantly, it would be near-impossible to appreciate. Conversely this would also be true. Nature itself dictates this necessary balance. Situations that demand extreme horror must also have elements of intense beauty. It is up to the individual,

the viewer, unique personalities to want to, or be able to find the balance. They must want to see and understand. I find it often interesting when certain individuals see my work as solely dark and eerie. They fail to see the balance within.

In recent years, you've become involved in music and photography. Do these means communicate the same themes as your paintings, or do you use each tool set to reveal different facets of yourself?

Actually, neither music nor photography are recent pursuits of mine. Although I always, as early as I can recall, maintained excessive drawing habits, it was formal study of music and guitar that was my main focus from age 8. Of course, I continued to draw consistently, but I studied guitar with instructors for six years, until I was 14, when art began to really take precedent. These days, one would never know I was formally trained in Classical and Spanish guitar. There was a strange shift somewhere with the art. It possessed me and really became the core of my spirit and output. Now, with my music, I don't read or write any of it. It is all emotional, experimental, flowing; the opposite of how I was trained really. Once the painting took possession, all of my formal music training evaporated.

I guess that's for the best. I think one of the greatest blessings that can occur in someone studying any formal art or medium is to eventually forget. It is at that point when nature convenes and one's true spirit takes flight.

I began experimenting with photography when I was around 20 and was trained for several years in traditional darkroom printing techniques. I've utilized photography in my work, or as a tool surrounding my work ever since.

Some of the various means I use for expression do communicate similar themes. What I am attempting to do with my music, in fact, is to utilize it as an extension of painting. I am still finding ways to do that, but the main focus with music is to generate similar thought and emotional processes I go through with painting to create an 'impression'. It's my form of, almost literally, painting with music. One luxury I have with my explorations in music is that I sometimes play with other people. Even though those collaborations are spontaneous and improvisational, there is always some form of discussion beforehand, so everyone involved is sharing the same thought process or general emotive output. It sustains focus and the results are usually much more interesting.

You shift shapes between three creative dialects already. Is there a yet untapped medium you'd like to master?

I often imagine my work and ideas in a fully realized, moving context. I think of my paintings sometimes like slides of a film. That being said, I also often work on painting after painting for years, a decade even, as one long series of ideas connected to each other. There really is no beginning and no end in some sense. There has been an interconnected relationship among my paintings from the start, to present day. There are elongated, elaborate ideas that I feel possibly stifled by painting single, or even multiple, panels of works. In this way, my natural gravitation is for film. Taking my vision and extending ideas into plots while maintaining the visual sense of my work feels like a very natural

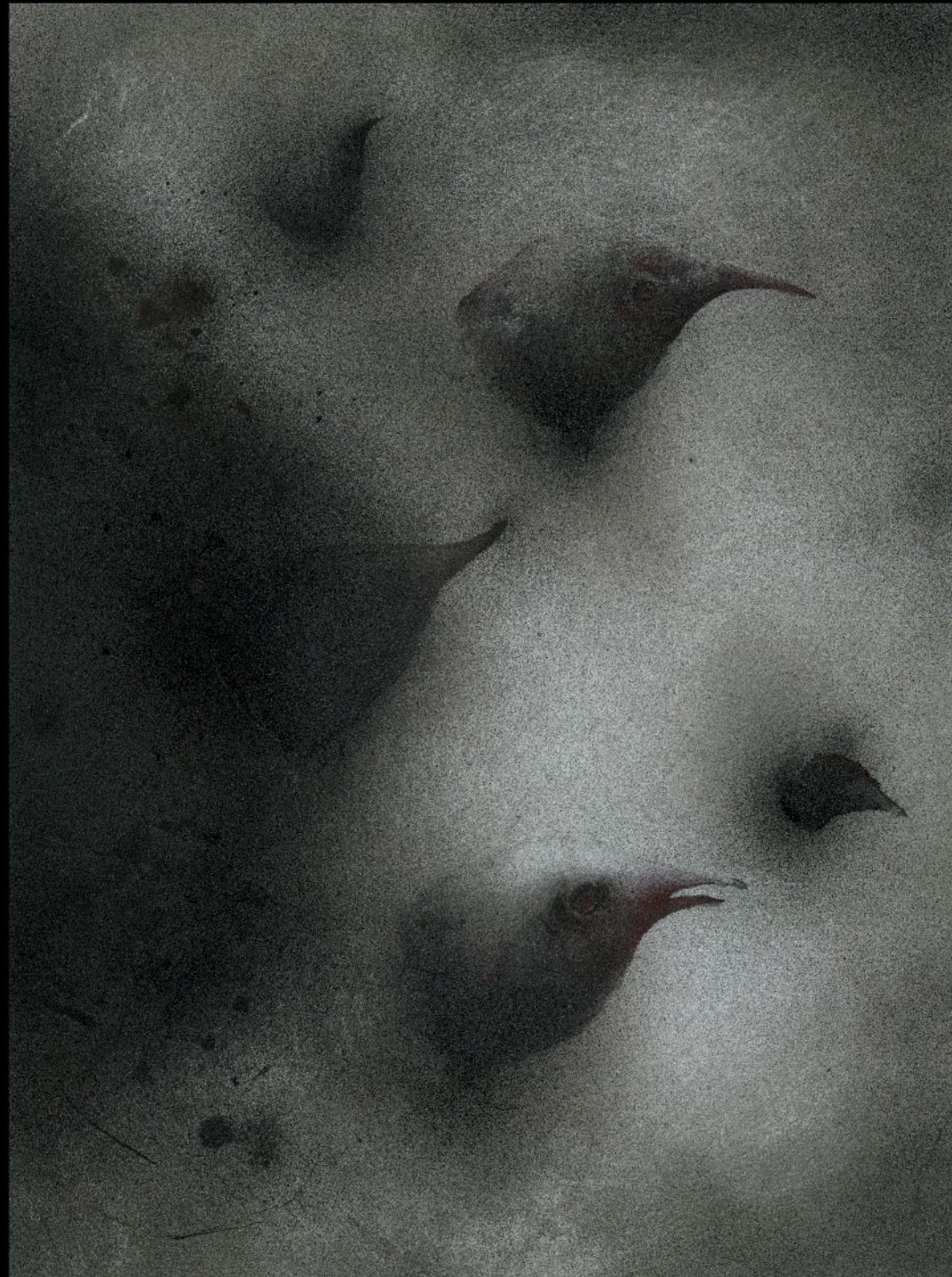


“I MUST FEEL THAT WHAT I AM PRODUCING IS PRECISELY RELATED TO UNIVERSAL IMPRESSIONS THAT I FEEL MYSELF AND AM STRONGLY CONNECTED TO.”

and possibly ultimate goal. The idea of producing and directing films feels very natural to me, and I am actually at the cusp of beginning to explore this now with short, semi-abstract digital film works. I'm not sure where it might lead, but the drive and vision is certainly there. If these works perhaps become assimilated into my exhibition spaces, combining them in the gallery arena along with paintings, that might make sense. I do not at all think that completely realized films are far from reach, though. It is not only feeling natural to me, it is beginning to feel necessary. That is all the drive I really need to figure out how to properly pursue it.

Hand in hand with this goal comes writing, of course. Since I often spend time writing my painting ideas out, I think extending this into characters and scenarios and events, the telling of a tale which I am already explaining in my painted works, also seems necessary now. I've had short story ideas which I have connected to my works in the past, so perhaps using writing as an extended medium from painting would be logical. We shall see where it all takes me, but the possibilities of what may come from it I find immensely exciting. It really is about uncovering the unknown, which I feel I've been doing my whole life.

INTERVIEW Zoetica Ebb



"ONE OF THE GREATEST BLESSINGS THAT CAN OCCUR IN SOMEONE STUDYING ANY FORMAL ART OR MEDIUM IS TO EVENTUALLY FORGET. IT IS AT THAT POINT WHEN NATURE CONVENES AND ONE'S TRUE SPIRIT TAKES FLIGHT."



INTO THE WOODS:

The Wisdom of Madeline von Foerster



THE MYSTICAL PAINTINGS OF MADELINE VON FOERSTER INVOKE NAMES LIKE VAN EYCK, BRUEGHEL, BOSCH, REMEDIOS VARO, ERNST FUCHS. IT'S VIBRANT, MULTI-LAYERED WORK, FILLED WITH OCCULT AND MEDIEVAL SYMBOLISM AND RENDERED IN THE PAINSTAKING EGG TEMPERA AND OIL TRADITION OF THE FLEMISH OLD MASTERS. AGELESS, YET THEMATICALLY TIMELY, SCHOLARLY BUT ALWAYS DEEPLY PERSONAL, HERS IS SIMPLY SOME OF THE MOST MOVING MODERN WORK IN THE MEDIUM.

ENDANGERED SPECIES II (underpainting), 2008 (12 x 15.5 inches)

IF YOU'RE FAMILIAR WITH THE PAINTING TECHNIQUE OF THE OLD MASTERS, CLOSELY EXAMINING PAINTINGS LIKE THESE CAN BE MIND-BOGGING... SO MANY SMOOTHLY-PLACED, MINUSCULE BRUSH STROKES, PATIENTLY LAYERED, CULMINATING IN PORTRAITS THAT CAN ONLY BE DESCRIBED AS HAVING AN UNEARTHLY INNER GLOW.

THE FIRST TIME I SAW MADELINE'S WORK UP CLOSE WAS AT A TYPICAL, OVERCROWDED NYC GALLERY OPENING: PLENTY OF CHEAP WINE AND FABULOUSLY DRESSED PEOPLE, ALL TALKING A LITTLE TOO LOUDLY OVER ONE ANOTHER. THEN THERE WAS MADELINE HERSELF, STANDING OFF TO ONE SIDE, AS ELEGANT AND LUMINOUS AS ONE OF HER PAINTINGS.

SINCE THAT TIME, I'VE COME TO KNOW HER AS ONE OF THOSE EXCEEDINGLY RARE EXAMPLES OF A PERSON WHOSE LIFE REFLECTS PURELY IN THEIR ART. SHE HAS A BIG BRAIN, BUT AN EVEN BIGGER HEART, AND IT'S A CERTAIN, ACHING SOULFULNESS AS MUCH AS THE RIGOROUS CRAFTSMANSHIP, THAT MAKES HER WORK SO EXCEPTIONAL.

RECENTLY, I STOPPED BY MADDY'S COZY STUDIO IN THE GREENPOINT NEIGHBORHOOD OF BROOKLYN TO VIEW HER NEW WALDKAMMER SERIES, AND WE CHATTED OVER A POT OF TEA. IN HER OWN WORDS, MADELINE HAS PAINTED A VISION OF "NINE IMAGINARY CABINETS IN WHICH TO EXPLORE HUMANITY'S OFTEN DESTRUCTIVE RELATIONSHIP WITH NATURE (IN PARTICULAR, THE CRISIS OF DEFORESTATION). THESE WOODEN CABINETS INTENTIONALLY ALLUDE TO THE ONCE-LIVING TREES THAT WERE THEIR SOURCE. MEANWHILE, THE 'CURIOSITIES' DISPLAYED ARE ACTUAL SPECIES, DEPENDANT ON THE TREES FOR SURVIVAL."

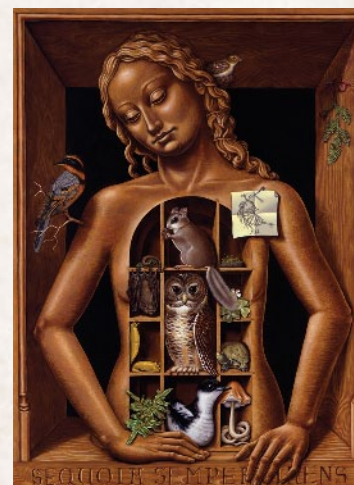
INTERVIEW Meredith Yayanos

Can we talk a bit about your studies/schooling as a painter? I have an art education, but I didn't start painting 'til after art school, on my own.

When I began, I knew how I wanted my paintings to look – a sort of Surrealist/Northern Renaissance mix – but I didn't know how to paint. So I would sweat out a painting and it would take me months. Ninety percent of the time, painting was a laborious, punishing exercise; really hard work. In 2004, doing some research on the internet, I found out about Philip Rubinov-Jacobson's Austrian seminar in the Mische technique. This is a 15th century technique developed by the Flemish Masters, the same ones I was trying to emulate, using alternating layers of white egg tempera and oil glazes. I rushed to sign up, and I'm so grateful to have had the chance. This is the way I make every painting now. Naturally, large paintings still take months, but the work is much easier and more enjoyable now. I don't think the method would be optimal for every painter, because it works best with careful drawing and planning, but it is certainly the one for me.

What attracted you specifically to the Northern Renaissance school?

I could give you the academic answer, but I am going to give you the honest answer, which is really silly. I was looking at the way they painted nudes, very idealized, with a tiny top, long spindly legs, and big bloated bellies.



Clockwise from top left, four compositions in oil and egg tempera on panels: **Redwood Cabinet**, 2008 (24 x 32.5 in), **Essentia Exaltata**, 2006 (9 x 12 in), **Specimen Cabinet**, 2008 (12 x 16 in), **Resurrection**, 2008 (16.75 x 24 in)

I thought, "That's me with PMS!" The fact that their iconic female figure resembles mine when my self-esteem is lowest, somehow was an invitation to investigate these paintings further, and I also marveled at the details and the drapery. These painters' minds worked in the same way my mind works. It was recognition.

There's such loving attention to detail in all of your work, down to the very last drop of dew on a flower petal, a cabinet's grain, the hair on a tarantula's leg. Many of the pieces in this recent Waldkammer series are quite large. I feel like I'm viewing, not months, but years worth of hard work here. It's breathtaking. It also looks like a rather formidable physical and mental endurance test! How do you keep your eyeballs from falling out of your head?

First of all, thank you, Mer. I am so glad you've gotten to see the works in person. It was a push to get these paintings done. For the final six months I worked seven days a week. Regular exercise was crucial. I decided it was more important to go running regularly, than to have a day off. I also tried to do things in batches – all the drawings, all the underpaintings, etcetera, in order to develop the body of work as a whole, and keep myself from getting bogged down on any single painting. But I would be lying if

I didn't admit there were many hours wasted staring at a panel, trying to motivate myself to do the next task.

I think my gallerist Yasha Young was a great assistance, here. Knowing that

the show was coming, knowing that she had made an investment in my work, and that I wasn't just working for my success alone now, was a great incentive. I'm sure you find the same thing true with yourself and the other *Coilhouse* women, since a magazine is also a giant undertaking. If you want to make impossible things happen, the way to do it is to commit to them and to involve others in that commitment. Then you can move mountains.

Or die trying! Do any of your body parts ever go numb?
My hand did, at the end! But I bought a wrist brace for it.

Do you ever hit either a physical or a mental wall and just go “AAAAGH”?
All the time! Several times a day, probably!

How do you work through it?
I have to talk myself out of it. My favorite recent tactic is to remind myself, when there is a challenge, that these are the moments when we are most alive – when we are pushing for something beyond our capabilities and comfort zone. That's all the “wall” is. It is the same for an athlete or indeed for anybody. To grope through that wall is to reach into aliveness and growth. But I also have to give myself permission (when



THE EYE: a flip book made by the artist at a very precocious six years of age.

“WE ARE MOST ALIVE WHEN WE ARE PUSHING FOR SOMETHING BEYOND OUR CAPABILITIES AND COMFORT ZONE.”



ROYAL PASTIME, 2007 (6 x 7.25 inches, not including frame)
“What can I say. I was inspired to create this painting upon learning how Karl Rove spent his first day of retirement: hunting doves. I thought, if the symbolism isn't too obvious for him, well...”

that tactic just doesn't work) to do something that may not be the best anyone has ever done, but is what I can manage at that moment. There will be other paintings.

Again in keeping with the Flemish masters, as well as the Medieval Alchemists, you'll often make very careful, conscious symbolic choices. As opposed to merely suggesting something with broad strokes, you render your allegories explicitly. Would you call yourself a classicist? A perfectionist? A control freak? [laughter]

I am probably all three, but I just know that that's how my art comes out. All my creativity seems to come out through this narrow aperture of highly detailed and specific imagery. Perhaps I'm too literal sometimes. At one point I went so far as to write captions for my paintings, and a friend told me, in essence, “you have to leave something for the viewer to bring to the experience!” And she was so right.

This whole issue is demonstrated perfectly at the Frick Museum here in New York, where perhaps my favorite painting of all time, Rembrandt's *Polish Rider*, hangs directly next to a Flemish Renaissance painting... a Van der Weyden, I think. As you know, my paintings more resemble the Van der Weyden – full of information – but the Rembrandt blows me away. The background is this giant murk of brown tar with only a few hints of landscape. But in trying to discern that environment, you become part of it. It is a collaborative magic between the painter and the viewer. I don't know if it is something I can ever achieve, but I am inspired and humbled by it.

There's an edge of surrealism to your work as well. So many scrumptious mutants, monsters, angels... How much of your work springs from the subconscious, from visions or dreams?

I love the Surrealists, but they probably wouldn't have approved of my process, which is less “automatic” or instinctive than theirs! I typically approach a painting intellectually, sometimes even writing down what I want to say, and then envisioning how best to express that visually. I make use of all those angels

“THE WHOLE DIY PUNK ETHIC WAS AN INCREDIBLY EMPOWERING CONTEXT IN WHICH TO EXIST. I WISH EVERY YOUNG PERSON COULD HAVE AN EXPERIENCE LIKE THAT.”



INVASIVE SPECIES I, 2008 (12 x 15.5 in). Oil and egg tempera on panel

and monsters as convenient conveyers of meaning, though my meanings are not always those that are determined in the iconography of history. I like to borrow those meanings and then play with them.

Any contemporaries whose work you particularly enjoy, or relate to?

I love the work of Julie Heffernan, Odd Nerdrum, and of my friend Benjamin Vierling, who you know painted the Joanna Newsom portrait for *Ys*. He works in the same oil/egg tempera technique I use. There are so many artists I like it would be hard to list them all, but those are three at the top.

“Pop Surrealism” is a label I see being slapped down on a lot of very disparate bodies of work. If someone ever slapped it on yours, I might squeal indignantly and peel it right off again! I love how difficult it is to properly classify your work in a modern context. Then again, the less easily pigeonholed you are, the more press opportunities you may miss. Do you ever feel like the odd one out? Do you care about stuff like that? I know the “message” behind your work is important to you, but are you a populist?

Oh, this is a big one... I am definitely a populist in that I think art should have an effect on people, and an effect on culture, while still being the artist’s truest expression. I am frankly disgusted with how much art out there has nothing to say, and offers no connection to the viewer whatsoever. This comes from an exploration that was perfectly laudable during the last century, when artists were concerned



MADELINE VON FOERSTER in her Greenpoint, Brooklyn studio (photo by Andrew Kistl). She’s seated next to her epic painting *Amazon Cabinet*, which was recently held by customs in Frankfurt, Germany until security could verify that the five-foot tall *Waldkammer* work had indeed been painted by a young American artist, and not by a 16th century Old Master.

Madeline’s a hubble lass and she’ll probably blush when she reads this, but I must add that in addition to being a phenomenal artist, the woman’s a five-alarm stunner who consistently dresses her tall, willowy fame to the nines. “I have a lot of fun with clothes because – hey, why not? You have to get dressed anyway! I have gotten some great things – and thrown away a ton of money on crap – from Ebay. Sometimes I invent weird search terms that define a particular mood and see what comes up. I would say my biggest fashion secret is to not be afraid to look like a look like a total idiot at least half of the time. And that’s probably a good rule of thumb for the rest of life, too.”

with exploding and dismantling everything that had come before. But it has reached a point of alienation and disingenuousness. Instead of being a gift from the artist to the world, most art now is a trick the artist is playing on the world. Of course, in the end the ultimate butt of this joke is artists themselves, because while society has found other avenues to bring beauty, and meaning into life – music, movies, blogs, etc. – contemporary art has little to no relevance.

I have absolutely no idea if I can have any effect on this sad state of affairs, but that has to be my goal. My intention is not to fit in, but to expand the envelope, to broaden the discussion. Pop Surrealism has made huge strides in this area simply by making art that people actually like to look at!

You were a feisty punk rock activist in your teens, making stencil art advocating for social reform and animal rights that you wheatpasted up all over town...

Yes, I was a founding member of a punk artist collective in the S.F. Bay Area. We made wheatpaste and stencil art, and also art for protests, like a giant three-headed puppet representing Columbus, Uncle Sam, and the Pope, for the 1992 Columbus Day celebrations. Fun stuff. What was so amazing about that period was that anyone could make a zine, or organize an event, or start a band and make a 7”, and go on tour without any money. The whole DIY punk ethic was an incredibly empowering context in which to exist. I wish every young person could have an experience like that.

Were you a bookworm child? A constant scribbler? Did your family encourage you to pursue art?

Yes, I was both: bookworm and constant scribbler. My family didn’t cultivate my art with classes or lessons, but they did make sure I always had plenty of art supplies, and they were incredibly supportive. The best thing they ever did for me was to raise me without TV. I would urge every parent out there to throw away your television set and let your kid find other things to do. How could I have developed the patience and creativity necessary to make my paintings, with that kind of instant-gratification entertainment always on hand? I still don’t watch TV. Nothing on TV, I think, could possibly be worth what people give up to ingest it. I’m not saying it isn’t ever good; I’m saying it isn’t worth the sacrifice of our precious time and brains. I rent movies when I have time – which is seldom – because film can be a magnificent art form, but my set has no antenna or cable.

Although your adult work’s grown far subtler over the years, its symbolism continues to reflect your deep concern for the planet and its inhabitants. Can you remember early instances of this compassion/compulsion to help your fellow creatures?

I was always a terrible softy, and always passionately concerned with fairness and with the suffering of others. I used to sleep teetering on the very edge of my bed, my mattress almost completely occupied with stuffed animals. Every one of them had to come to bed with me, every night, because I couldn’t bear hurting the feelings of the ones who were excluded. I really believed my animals and dolls were sentient, for a long time. Every child inherently loves animals, so I think I was just normal in that regard. It is a love which has stuck with me. I was lucky to be exposed to ideas of environmentalism and vegetarianism when I was young, and took to those notions.

I know you participated in the spay-and-release program for stray Brooklyn cats for quite a while. Care to talk a bit about your experience with that?

Thanks for asking! For anyone who is agonized by the sight of feral cats in your neighborhood, there is something you can do. It is easy and absolutely worthwhile. I started feeding two starving feral cats near my studio, one of whom was pregnant. I went to a three hour training session with Neighborhood Cats, a great group here in New York. They explained how to rent traps, which I did, and they loaned me a cage for the kittens (who had been born in the meantime). I trapped the whole family, and took the adults to the vet to be spayed

and vaccinated. The kittens I kept at home in the cage, petting them every day, till they were tame enough to be adopted (adult feral cats can almost never be domesticated, but with the kittens it’s usually possible, and really fun). The sad part was that a few weeks after the adult cats were released, they disappeared, their food dishes full. Feral cats will almost never leave their territory voluntarily, so I think they must have eaten rat poison or been otherwise killed. It was a very sad end to what had been a rewarding and wonderful experience.

Not too long ago, you showed a rather bleak series of paintings inspired by life in wartime. As this magazine goes to print, the Bush administration is packing up. On January 20th, we’ll have President Obama in the White House. How are you feeling about what’s happened?

The state that the world is now in only demonstrates the putrid greed, waste, ignorance, and death-worshipping tendencies of the last U.S. administration, and to various extents, the rest of the American government. I have high hopes for Obama, but I don’t know if any one elected president could enact the kind of changes really necessary to stop catastrophic global warming, which is a much bigger long-term concern than either war or the economy.

Even your darker, more brooding paintings are imbued with light and hope. I’m thinking specifically of *The Dodo Egg*, *The Promise*, the mandrill *Mother and Child*. In certain cases – for instance *Entitlement* and *Royal Pastime*, which are very grim – the hope still remains because you have rendered the slain dove and that menacing crown of swords with such painstaking care. They are beautifully sad/frightening. I’d like to think that where there is attention to beauty, there is always hope. How do you stay hopeful?

This is a great question. I am incredibly pessimistic about the future of this earth. As E.O. Wilson describes, we are hurtling towards “The Age of

“AS E.O. WILSON DESCRIBES, WE ARE HURTLING TOWARDS “THE AGE OF LONELINESS,” THE COMING TIME WHEN HALF OF THE WORLD’S SPECIES WILL BE EXTINCT, AND ALL THE MAGNIFICENT WILDERNESSES DENUDED AND TORN. TILL MY DYING BREATH I WILL RAGE AND FIGHT AGAINST THAT FUTURE, BUT I AM ONLY ONE PERSON.”



THE DODO EGG, 2007 (5.5 x 7 inches, not including frame)



ENTITLEMENT, 2007 (6 x 7.25 inches, not including frame) “Why is authority so often linked with war and violence? Some leaders see waging war as inextricable from and synonymous with leadership. This has been true throughout human history. Isn’t it time for a new paradigm of leadership?”

Loneliness,” the coming time when half of the world’s species will be extinct, and all the magnificent wildernesses denuded and torn. Till my dying breath I will rage and fight against that future, but I am only one person and it is definitely swimming against the tide. Whatever I am personally able to do will not significantly decrease the likelihood of that outcome. However, I have been given this gift of life, and I believe it is the only one I will get. Therefore, I am greedy for such experiences as love, happiness, and hope. And that is how I choose to live my life. It is a choice, because even as there is always infinite cause for despair and regret, there is infinite possibility for grace, even bliss. One cause for hope is, I am far from the only person who is outraged about the treatment of the planet. Sometimes cultural evolution can occur at a rapid pace – look at women’s rights – even when humans retain the same selfish and industriously destructive DNA we’ve always had. America is currently in the throes of an epiphany: that our profligate lifestyle has been a spending spree made on unsustainably borrowed credit. Hopefully we will figure out that it has been paid for with unsustainably borrowed planetary resources, too. Things are very bad, and there is not much time, but there is still hope.

Any thoughts on taking personal responsibility as an artist? As a human being? As a living being, period?

In a way, the crisis is great enough that there is less need for categories. It’s more like, “All hands on deck!” Everyone can figure out for themselves what gifts they can bring to the table, but then they need to bring them. Seriously, we need all of you. The world needs all of you. And I don’t care whether we’re talking about fighting poverty, war, AIDS, deforestation, or just about spending more time with each other, hiking to the top of that hill you can see from your window, or reading that book you love in the original French, like you always wanted to do. Turn off your television and do it.



CABINET FOR A SPOTTED OWL, 2008 (9 x 12 inches) Ink Drawing

The advent of the internet and the nearly non-existent gestation period for creative work before it's commoditized has definitely changed the way we bohos live and work, think and socialize. I worry that with all of this pixelated material instantly at our fingertips, we're losing appreciation for craft, detail, depth, tangibility. We want it all and we want it now, and damn the consequences. Do you think alternative culture as we once defined it is endangered? Extinct?

This is the Great Investigation of your magazine and I applaud you for it. Things have definitely changed... we have gone from zines to blogs, from homemade cassettes to downloads, and I could romanticize the past and insist those things were better, but who knows?

In the course of my life I've waded through a wide swath of alternative culture – falling in love with goth, industrial, punk, crust, black metal, neo-folk, etc. There were often mileposts on this journey when something dear to my heart appeared in peril of being “co-opted,” and taken away from me forever. Somehow this always failed to ruin my life the way I predicted it would. But I guess it is an occupational hazard. Those in a position to make money from these things will forever come parasitizing after our energy and creativity. If all we give them, and all they can “steal” from us, are the very ideas and values that are needed in the culture at large, I say leave that barn unlocked and the stable door open wide! But I am not in favor of “selling out,” if it means diluting your vision or making it “palatable” to the masses. I say, convert the masses, not the message.



IN THE GARDEN, 2002 (48 x 72 inches)

DESTRUCTURAS and DIO
FUTURE FASHION BY
GUSTAVO
LOPEZ
MAÑAS







ART DIRECTION X-presion Productions **STYLIST** Jessica and X-presion **MAKEUP** Antonio Estrada **HAIR** X-presion
PHOTOGRAPHER ASSISTANT Ruben Bernad **POST PRODUCTION** Gustavo Lopez **MODELS** Vinila Von Bismark, Carmen Martinez





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**FALL-WINTER
COLLECTION
2008**



KATE O'BRIEN
ARTIST OF THE PORTRAIT AS A YOUNG WOMAN



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STRICT MACHINE / Model: Beth Incognito



NEO-CLASSICAL SUPERHERO / Model: Leonie Prendeville



QVEENE ANEKIE / Model: Anekie DeBrincat



JEUNE FILLE DÉLIVRANT UN OISEAU DE SA CAGE / Model: Laurel Fox

Australian photographer Kate O'Brien's photos are fantasy snow globes, arranged just so. Not a shiny curl out of place, not a flower askew, they're bottled candy bliss.

An avid collector, Kate finds inspiration everywhere. Online auctions, liquidators and op-shops are her hunting grounds when in search of the perfect piece to finalize her vision. Driven by a deep love of Victoriana and the macabre, Kate often spends years looking for weird and wonderful items to include in her photographs.

O'Brien's lives in Brisbane with her husband, two cats and five chickens. There she continues to immortalize an ever-growing assortment of muses, each image a sugar-dusted memento of an eerie world in a simpler time.



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Deee-Lite • Burroughs • Screamin' Mimes • Feral Moans



1992: I'm browsing through magazines in the library of my small Montana high school when I come across an issue of TIME magazine with the word "cyberpunk" on the cover. I've never heard the word before, but I understand the concept instantly. I am, after all, a computer nerd.

The article inside talks about the nascent cyberpunk movement, which in the early 90s is still mostly fictional: William Gibson, Bruce Sterling, Max Headroom. But it also talks about a bunch of weirdos out in California who put out this glossy 'zine called *Mondo 2000* that's all about electronic music and obscure drugs and virtual reality – things I very much want to have in my life, which mainly consists in 1992 of hanging out in my bedroom in my family's trailer, masturbating incessantly while listening to Nine Inch Nails and Nirvana, and trying desperately not to die of utter boredom.

Five years later: I'm in the living room of R.U. Sirius – one of the weirdos I'd read about, the co-founder of Mondo 2000. I've met Sirius through his writing partner and co-conspirator, the legendary (and now deceased) St. Jude Milhon, patron goddess of hackers and lunatics and malcontents – People Like Us, in other words. I've come to San Francisco nominally to study computer graphics and really, I'm discovering, to write for *Mondo 2000*. Even though *Mondo* is in its last gasps due to mismanagement and feuding and general chaos, and even though Sirius is only tangentially connected with the magazine – he and I are in the process of starting a (short-lived) online 'zine called Revolting.com – it feels like I've come to the millennial equivalent of Warhol's Factory. I'm surrounded by strange and beautiful and psychotic people, some of whom seem willing to accept me and/or sleep with me.

NO DEATH FOR THE PERFECT MEN: A CONVERSATION WITH **mondo 2000's** R.U. SERIOUS

I'm 19 years old and I am in the coolest place in the world at the coolest time to be there. None of us know it, but the deeply weird world of Bay Area technoculture is about to be taken over by MBAs with bristly haircuts and VCs whose goofy utopian smiles never reach their dead eyes. The wave hasn't begun to break yet, and the Internet is still a new and uncertain notion to most of the world. Not to us, though; we've been there for a while, and right now we are riding the top of the wave like the beach is a million miles away.

Sirius hands me a pipe filled with some kind of strange powder. "You wanna smoke some DMT?" he asks, grinning.

Yes. Yes I do.

R.U. Sirius was the man who made technology subversive. A former Yippie and small-town New York radical, he founded the neo-psychedelic magazine *High Frontiers* in 1984 with publisher Queen Mu, St. Jude as editor and photographer Bart Nagel as art director. *High Frontiers* became *Reality Hackers* became *Mondo 2000*. A travelogue to what Sirius called the "New Edge", *Mondo* published conversations between Tim Leary (with whom Sirius co-authored the book *Designs for Dying*) and William Burroughs between interviews with Gibson and the young Trent Reznor and ruminations on math and mysticism by cyberpunk novelist and mathematician Rudy Rucker and guides to establishing a smart drug regimen and building your own virtual reality rig out of desktop Macs and spare parts. It was erudite and profane, idealistic and slacker, academic and street-wise, often all in the same article...and it was, as Neil Gaiman once told me, the

"WHEN PEOPLE START SEEING PURPLE PEOPLE AND REALLY SMART MACHINES AND SO FORTH IN FRONT OF THEM, THAT'S GOING TO BLOW SOME HOLES."

coolest magazine in the world for a while. *Mondo's* motto – emblazoned on t-shirts – was "How fast are you? How dense?"

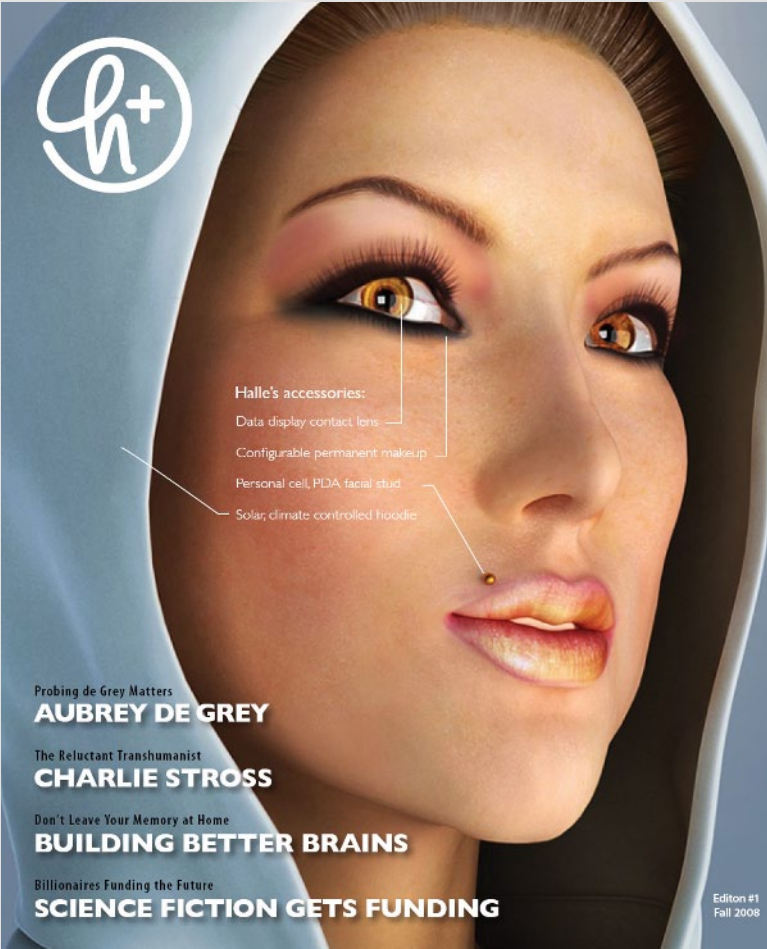
And like all cool things, it ran its course – as Sirius has pointed out, it was the only magazine with a built-in shelf life right in the title. The various regulars and staff drifted away. Jude Milhon died of cancer in 2003. Sirius edited a few magazines, and had a run of recent success with his weekly podcast, the R.U. Sirius Radio Show, and his now-defunct webzine, 10 Zen Monkeys.

R.U. Sirius is still fast, and still dense; and though he has never to my mind been recognized as the visionary that his career shows him to be, he's still a soldier in the culture wars, digging away at the foundations of reality.

I wanna go back to the notion of the “edge”. When I first encountered Mondo as a 14-year-old living in a trailer in Montana, the whole cyberpunk movement seemed incredibly... not just transgressive, but almost on a totally parallel track to mainstream culture, the whole intersection of hacker culture and psychedelic culture and industrial/punk culture.

These days, my mom has a BitTorrent account for downloading Dan Fogelberg bootlegs. Did you ever think cyberpunk culture would really be co-opted by the mainstream?

Who knew, one way or another? There was the fantasy that the bohos and anarchists could define the future simply by being first and smartest and by overwhelming the world with fresh energy... I guess, just like the hippies thought they were doing in the 1960s. Only we were pretty aware the degree to which it could just be a fantasy. When you're trying to make magick (if you will), you have to just go into what you're hoping to invoke, evoke, provoke etcetera. And by thinking sometimes (maybe when you're high) that you can invert the very color of being or transmute the whole world in a



single cum or whatever, you get some energy and you can push things a bit further. But if you hang out with that too long, you become an idiot. So sadly, I've become a bit of a realist these days... even with the transhumanist theme, I'm dealing with it in a pretty down to earth basis. And I'm not a very good optimist. (I just play one on TV.)

So where's the New Edge now, then, Future Boy?

Oh, I think it's probably in this transhumanist crap ;-) mostly. In 10 years or so, people will probably be able to biologically change their skin colors... and not just to the usual choices. You know, when people start seeing purple people and really smart machines and so forth in front of them, that's going to blow some holes.

On the other hand, I think the next “edge” is in resolving the energy

problem and redefining money in some way that isn't quite clear yet. It was always largely about ending scarcity and ending wage slavery as far as I was concerned. I always thought that having to do something you don't want to do for money was the main form of day-to-day coercion that we experience, which I think distinguishes me from the libertarians.

It's weird how far that shit has advanced without us even really noticing. In 1981, the idea that you could or would intentionally inject botulism into your facial muscles to induce paralysis would have sounded like a riff from a John Shirley novel.

Yeah. Middle class housewives shooting up botox comes up in h+ at one point. Jeff Koons liked to say that Michael Jackson was “baptized in banality.” And so, M.J., steroidal sportsmen, inflated boobs, botox parties. Whoo hoo! Whatever. Just ride it out, huh? And maybe we can do some interesting things with it...

So, beyond the book and the magazine, what does the future hold for R.U Sirius?

Who the fuck knows? I hope this magazine becomes a print mag with a broader agenda. The time is now. I want to write a sort-of memoir/novel because my life has been weird... not really adventurous, just odd. Every life is odd, but I think I can make a real strong claim on high level oddness... mostly involving stuff other people did around me, not stuff I did myself.

You always have seemed to be around in the right places at the right times, kinda like Zelig. I remember you telling me stories about hanging out at Max's Kansas City back during the heyday of that scene.

Yeah, and also in the wrong places. Mostly, in the 70s I lived in this small town in upstate New York... the freaks there were the weirdest. When I wound up hanging out with Leary or other leading lights of the counterculture part of me kept thinking, “Man, these people are pretty normal!” Of course, we got a few strange ones together at Mondo. The women around that time were particularly strange. I guess I'm not supposed to say that, but it's just true.

I remember going to one of the Anon Salon parties and listening to a Mondo cover model in a holographic bodysuit ranting about the sublime pleasures of wheatgrass enemas... the women were definitely strange. (Often in good ways.) I remember when you were trying to set me up with Kathy Acker before she died to go be her cabana boy or some weird shit like that...

Acker was strange in a great way! I dream about her still sometimes. There's a movie about her out right now at the Mill Valley Film Festival. I'll be going this week. Cyberpiss Goddess from Mondo Vanilli may have been the one who talked about those enemas. She did coffee and alcohol enemas but then became a health freak. She also did on-stage enemas over a canvas... kind of enema paintings. Totally objectionable hipster bullshit by all today's standards. Such a tight assed culture today, huh? Heh...

Half the sex I ever got when I was 19-20, I got because I was writing for Mondo and hanging out with you guys. Those girls were weird, but they were lovely. So thanks for that.

Hey, if I could go back and do it again, there would be more sex and I'd be more appreciative.

INTERVIEW Joshua Ellis



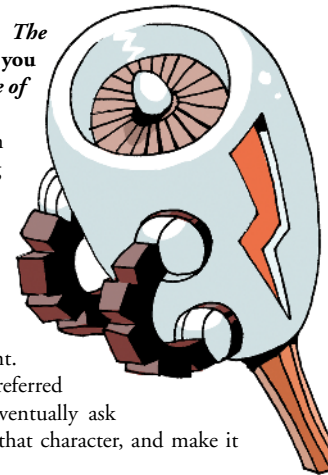
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ADVENTURES IN BABYSITTING: AN INTERVIEW WITH COMICS CREATOR ANDY RISTAINO

Andy Ristaino is the creator of two Slave Labor Graphics titles: *Life of A Fetus*, and *The Babysitter*. The latter – a glorious visual, textural, and typographical clusterfuck – has just been collected in a glossy oversized collection that includes several full color pages, concept design sketches, and some fascinating insights from its mastermind.

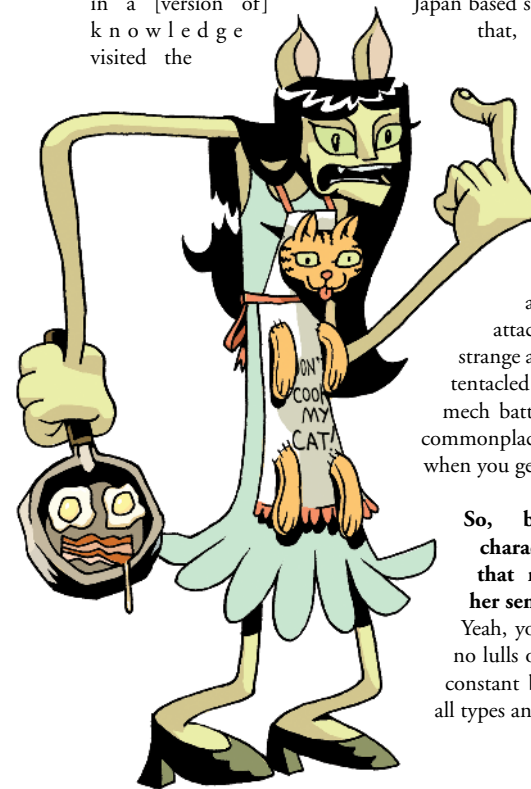
Where did your concept for *The Babysitter* come from? I know you were pitching your other book, *Life of a Fetus* to Dan Vado over at SLG...

In my original pitch of *L.o.a.F.*, Dan Vado said that there was one thing that totally stuck out and sold him on the project: a drawing of a Japanese schoolgirl/hit-man (hit-girl?) holding an Uzi with a silencer on it and wearing a jetpack. It might have been the first and only drawing of the character I'd done at that point. She didn't even have a name; I just referred to her as "the Babysitter". Dan eventually asked me to do a one-shot comic on just that character, and make it



"I EVENTUALLY ENDED UP WITH A COMIC ABOUT A BABYSITTER WITH ABSOLUTELY NO BABYSITTING IN IT, LIVING IN A [VERSION OF] JAPAN BASED SOLELY ON THE POP CULTURE KNOWLEDGE THAT I ACCRUED FROM A LIFETIME OF LOOKING AT FAR TOO MUCH MANGA AND ANIME."

normal and streamlined so that we could pitch it as a movie or animated series. Naturally, my mind – being what it is – immediately veered in the opposite direction, much to Dan's eventual dismay. I eventually ended up with a comic about a babysitter with absolutely no babysitting in it, living in a [version of] Japan based solely on the pop culture knowledge visited the



that, having never actually country, I accrued from a lifetime of looking at far too much manga and anime. It's a world crammed with cyborgs gone mad, instances of demonic possession and giant monster attacks, space invaders, strange and scary mental powers, tentacled beasts, and intense mech battles. These things are as commonplace as having a cup of joe when you get up.

So, basically, the main character is living in a world that never stops assaulting her senses.

Yeah, you betcha. A world with no lulls or quiet moments, just a constant barrage of aggression of all types and flavors coming





"WHEN I WORK AND GET REALLY INTO IT, MY EYEBALL IS USUALLY ABOUT AN INCH AWAY FROM THE PAGE."



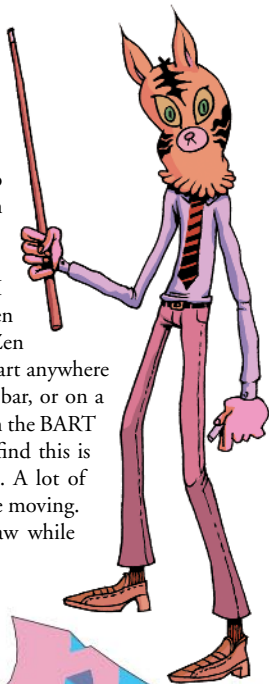
“I DON’T THINK YOU’RE EVER ABLE TO TOTALLY SHUT OUT BACKGROUND NOISE. IT’S ALWAYS BACK THERE SOMEWHERE, WHETHER IN THE TENSION IN YOUR SHOULDERS, THE KNOTS IN YOUR BACK, OR SOME CRAZY COMIC ABOUT HOW CHAOTIC THIS WORLD IS.”

older brothers are great artists in their own right. We all used to draw together. My parents bought big rolls of paper that we would roll out on the kitchen table and draw huge panoramas. Usually it would end up being these massive train-of-thought battle scenes (kinda like what I’m still drawing).

That makes a lot of sense. Obviously, to be as prolific as you are, you’ve had to find surefire ways to shut out that background noise. Or is it that you just funnel all of that chaos directly onto the page?

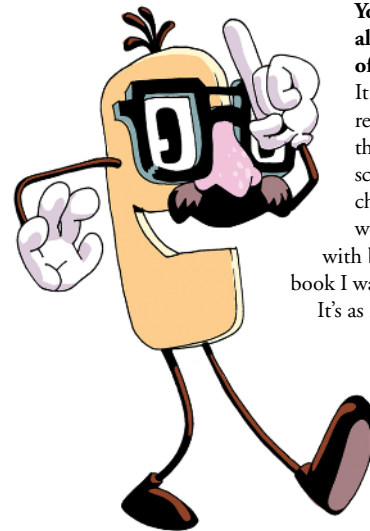
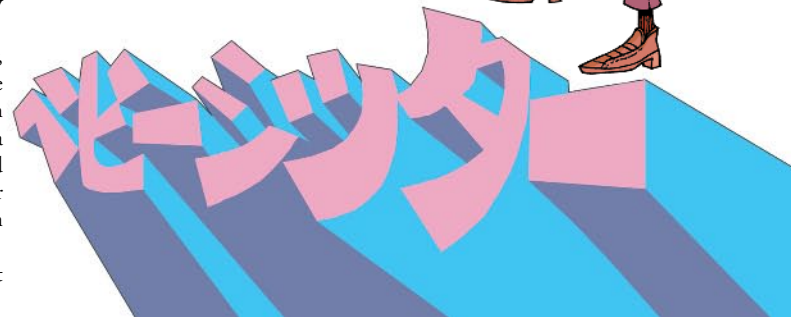
I don’t think you’re ever able to totally shut out background noise. It’s always back there somewhere, whether in the tension in your shoulders, the knots in your back, or some crazy comic about how chaotic this world is. As people get older, you see how they become bent and molded by their experience. I have some major back and hand issues. I’m not saying it’s a result of the stresses around me –it’s more likely the result of bad posture-- but I’m sure stress doesn’t help. I think much of my working method, ability to focus, and passion for drawing, developed from a need to shut out the environment I live in.

To escape. It’s strange that the escape would lead me to telling stories, however obtusely, about the world I exist in. I’m able to work on artwork anywhere and in any situation. When I was younger I was shy and awkward (not much has changed) so in social situations I would draw when I hung out with people. They would talk, and I would sit there and draw and sometimes chime in. It’s not like I wasn’t present; I actually absorb and listen better while drawing. It’s kind of a Zen meditation thing. These days I work on art anywhere and everywhere I can: coffee shops, at a bar, or on a train or plane. Actually, I’m typing this on the BART train on the way to work right now. I find this is a great place to write or plan out pages. A lot of times, thinking works better for me while moving. If only I could figure out a way to draw while riding a bike.



You grew up in a large, artistic family. It must’ve gotten pretty clamorous at times. Do you think that’s affected you creatively?

Growing up in a big family was fun and stressful. I miss it. In a big family, there was always something going on... whether you wanted there to be or not. It’s funny, my brother Mark and I always talk about how we can sleep though anything. I think that has something to do with being in a big family with not that much space. You always had to sleep with loud things going on all around you, or the lights on, or in a cramped space, or all three. I would definitely say that my family has influenced my work in obvious and subversive ways. My parents were both super encouraging in anything involving the arts. They sent my brothers and I to special art classes (and eventually helped send me to a good art school). Both of my



Your work is extremely dense, multi-layered, and not always particularly linear. The layouts for *Babysitter* are alternately claustrophobic or agoraphobic. It’s either a semiotician’s wet dream, or their worst nightmare! In spite of being two-dimensional, the drawings seem almost... sculptural. Is texture something you obsess over?

It depends on the project. I think it’s in my nature to focus and obsess over all of the little details. When I work and get really into it, my eyeball is usually about an inch away from the page. With *The Babysitter* I originally wanted the whole thing to feel like a woodcut, but as I got further into the book, the goal became more to create artwork that imitated sculpture and space. An illusion of depth where there was none. As far as creating a claustrophobic environment for the characters to live in, I decided to err on the side of insanity. Thick and solid panel borders, cramped areas where even the word balloons would be fighting with the characters for space and attention. “Horror Vacui.” No space left unmarked, with both character and viewer assailed with as many directions and distractions as I could throw at them. By the end of the book I wanted the pages and space to expand. The final section of the book has many more double page spreads and page bleeds. It’s as if the art is pushing and bending the panel border, and eventually breaks the barriers imposed on it by its creator.

***The Babysitter* is rife with secret codes, cross-references, double-entendres, out-of-left-field non-sequiturs... You’ve gone out of your way to make readers look more closely and extrapolate. What I mean is, you can’t just “skim” this stuff if you hope to understand what on earth’s going on! Do you ever worry about not being “understood” in a narrative sense?**

I’ve always had a problem with comics, my own books included, that you pick up and read in a matter of minutes, then maybe never even look at it again. So much time and effort goes into making comic books, but for the most part, they’re still a disposable medium. With *The Babysitter*, I wanted to create a book where you couldn’t just skip ahead and read the last panel to find out what happens. I wanted something you had to translate. Concentrate on. Work to figure out. Like one of those magic eye puzzles. You had to really focus on different areas of the image to get what was going on...but hopefully, the page still worked on a whole. I wanted to create an experience that you really had to spend time with and could find new things going on at every viewing. Something that was so dense that I might hurt the living human brain.

As far as being worried about being understood. Hell yes! I’ve had many a nervous breakdown and spent countless hours wondering and worrying about what people think of the book. Setsuko is a little bit of an unreliable narrator, too. That adds to the confusion. You never know how someone is going to translate anything in his or her brain. That’s one of the things I find most fascinating and distressing about this plane of existence we live in. It’s one of the major themes of everything I’ve worked on, and I don’t think I will ever truly understand it.

If you could give Setsuko any advice, what would it be?

I’m not sure if I have any advice. I’m still figuring out this stuff myself. But here’s something:

Hang in there, kiddo. Learn your triggers. Find something you love to do, and do it. Get help if you need it. Screw what everyone else thinks... don’t worry about it, or at least try not to worry as much.

All images from *The Babysitter Collection* by Andy Ristaino. Reproduced with kind permission of Slave Labor Graphics.

INTERVIEW Meredith Yayanos

THE MANITOUR COMETH. RISTAINO’S MECHA-RIFF ON A WOODBLOCK PRINT BY THE GREAT JAPANESE UKYO-E ARTIST, ICHIYUSAI HIROSHIGE.





PARTY PLUMAGE

THE THREE HOUR CHALLENGE

“ON AN ORDINARY DAY, THROWING TOGETHER A SLAPDASH ENSEMBLE IS FUN, BUT INTRODUCE A FEW TRIALS AND PRECONDITIONS AND THINGS GETS REALLY INTERESTING.”

Here's the scenario: after a late night of debauched revelries, you slowly regain consciousness sprawled half on/half off your bed. Scraping off the last of yesterday's war paint, you realize you have only three hours to concoct the perfect outfit for, say, a piñata party. You have \$100 in your budget and the clock is ticking. On an ordinary day, throwing together a slapdash ensemble is fun, but introduce a few trials and preconditions and things get *really* interesting. We'll call it the Three Hour Challenge.

Prepare to be flexible. This is the ideal time to visit a vintage shop – your options are guaranteed to be much more fun, affordable and unique. Let the spirit of adventure drive you forth! But before skipping off to your neighborhood purveyor of vintage goods, take heed: at all costs, beware the dreaded Vortex of Possibilities. The Vortex is a dangerous psychological disorder wherein which time stands still, and eyes lose focus after the first fifteen minutes. Resist! If you don't have a clear idea of what you're after and get sucked into the Vortex, you might find yourself wandering around a shop for hours, digging through bins of beglittered underpants and risking your outfit's coherence. Concentrate!

I took the Three Hour Challenge with a conspirator, Lumi Valkionen. Miss Lumi and I go so far back, it's a little scary. We're both artists and rabid aesthettes: a dandy fit for this feat. Our mission commenced at Aardvark's Old Ark. Aardvark, with scores of tutus strung up at the ceiling and colorful textiles as far as the eye could see, with plastic ant-bear mannequins in its Melrose Avenue windows and walls lined with endless racks of dresses, all sorted by color and decade! Having such excellent organization at our fingertips, we accomplished our objective in no time at all. (Admittedly, there were a few minor forays into stacks of hats and unmentionables. Set like traps around the shop, their lure was strong and we were weak.)

An hour-and-a-half into the Challenge, we determinedly pulled ourselves from Aardvark's musty embrace and headed over to the local Goodwill for a few final touches. This giant chain of secondhand stores is perfect for accessory shopping: once again, everything's is color-coded to match your outfit's main components. Buried under the piles of camphor-scented holiday sweaters, worn romance paperbacks and outdated kitchen appliances, treasure waits to be discovered. However, the size of these places can prolong your stay and the variety may threaten to overwhelm. Once again, I urge you: beware the Vortex! Stay focused in the face of adversity with your future fabulous self in mind. We stayed the course and zoomed through in under an hour, then headed back to my place to evaluate the loot.

My perfect dress had been tried on by a few overzealous fashionistas and was splitting at the seams. No big deal. A bit of gold thread whipped the 60s taffeta treasure back into shape in under twenty minutes. When faced with this problem, remember, there's no need to conceal the stitches. Instead, make your handiwork part of the outfit; it's much easier than stealth stitching in a hurry.

Some vintage pieces become even more desirable once they're beyond repair. Lumi fell in love with a tattered black and gold top which she further distressed. Call it haphazard deconstruction, call it ragamuffin chic, a perfectly viable option it remains. While I chose a structured look, Lumi's outfit paid tribute to the glories of excess, accented with multiple leather belts and hardware strapped all over. Adding a pair of cut-up leggings and some heels, her look was complete and we were off, our piñata party plumage ready to flaunt exactly three hours after we began operations.

Now, comrades, it's your turn! Find a partner in crime, set the timer, and pull together a magnificent-yet-thrifty party outfit. Be sure to snap a photo of the results and send it to zoetica@gmail.com to have your submission featured on the *Coilhouse* blog. Don't waste another minute – the Secret Piñata Society awaits!

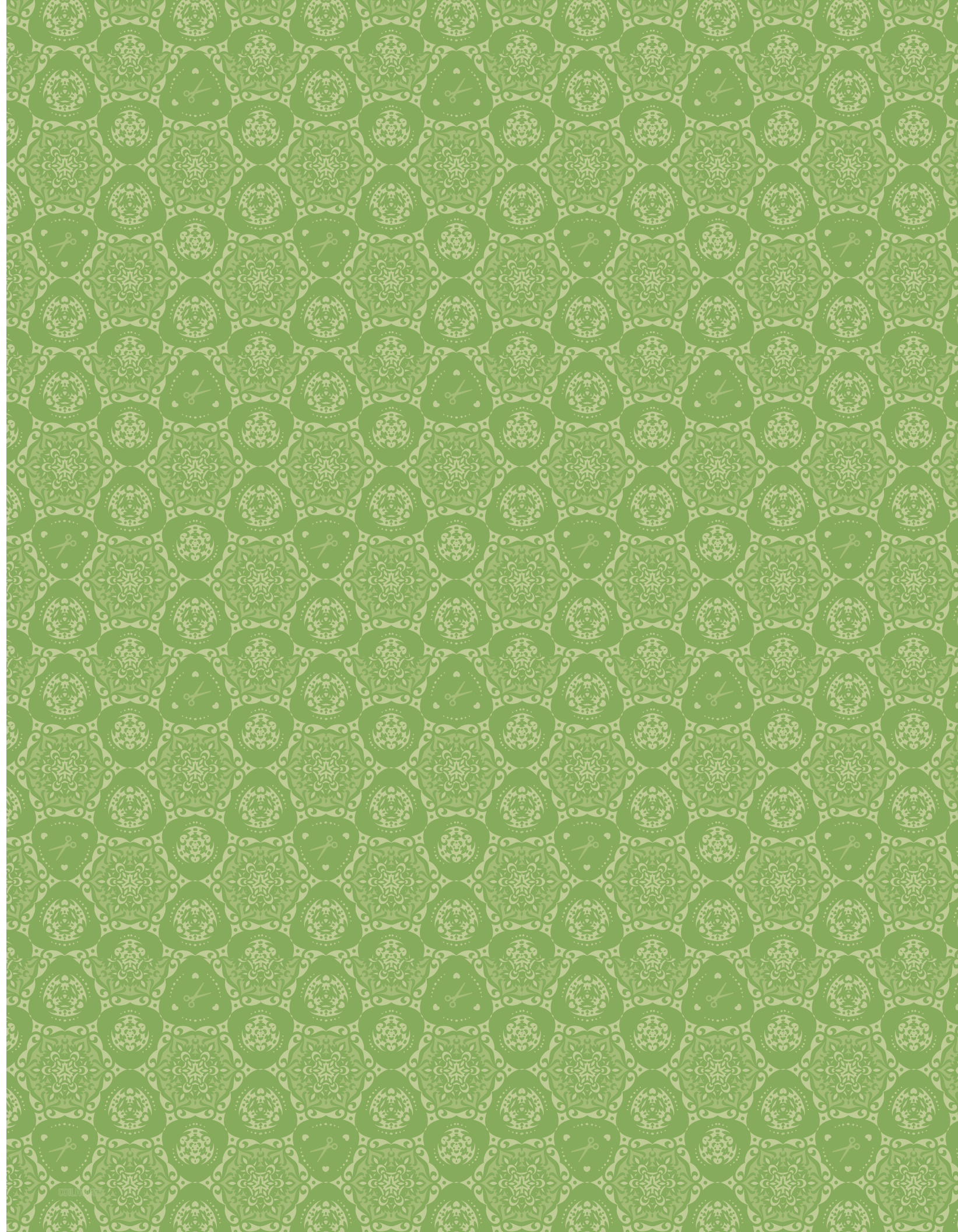
ARTICLE Zoetica Ebb
IMAGES Drew Yoon





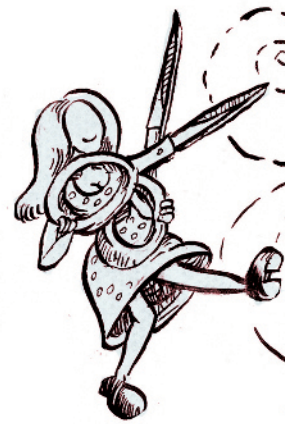
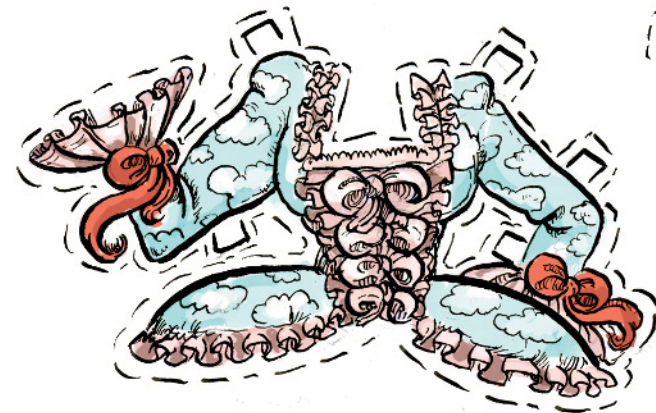
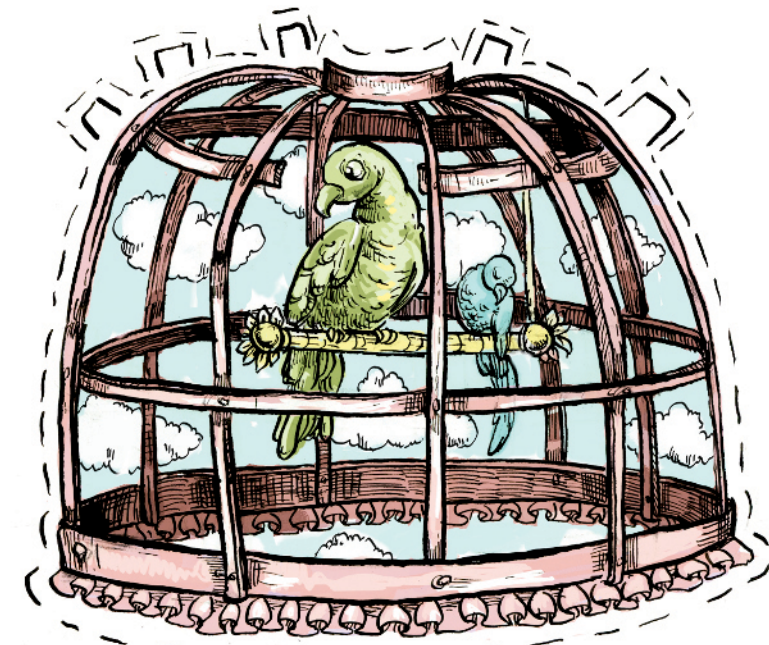
"I URGE YOU TO REMAIN FOCUSED IN THE FACE OF ADVERSITY WITH YOUR FUTURE FABULOUS SELF IN MIND."





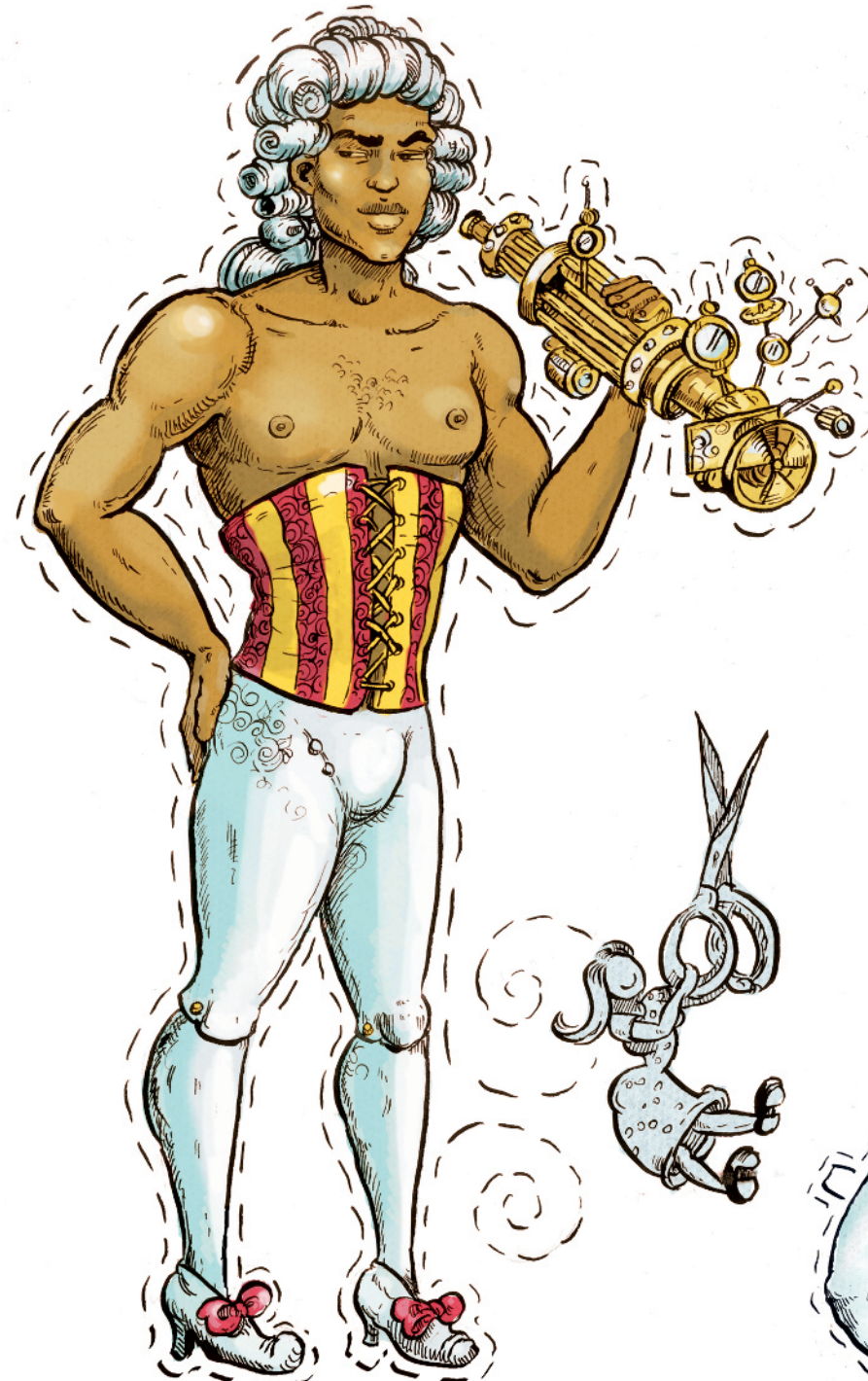
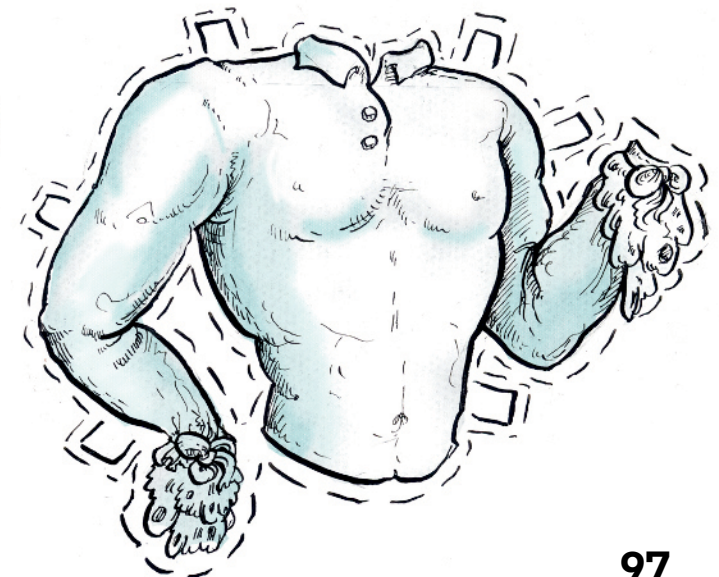
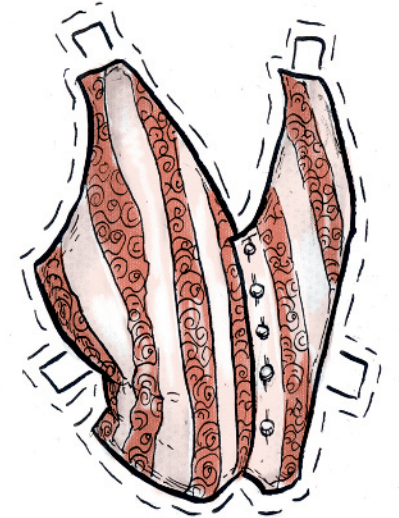
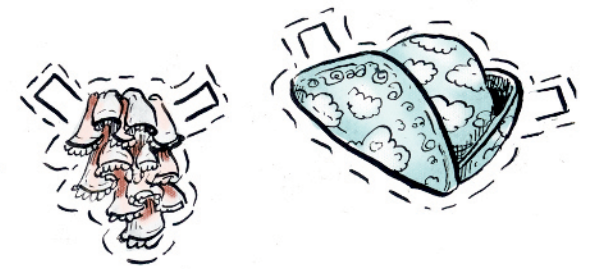
Print to Fit

PAPER DOLLS BY MOLLY CRABAPPLE



FRENCH Rococo was one of the most surreal, high-artificial places Western fashion has gone. Imprisoned in the castle of Louis XIV, aristocrats replaced constant warfare with a high octane whirl of parties and gambling. Social hierarchies were rigid. Who bowed where became a matter of vital importance, and robotic court proceedings were reflected in the frilly exoskeletons of the courtiers' clothing. With his nobles distracted by triviality, King Louis ruled unchallenged for nearly a hundred years.

A Princess of the Blood, Marie Claire considers herself a high artist of artifice, hiding behind the false face of her fan. Pierre, meanwhile, is fascinated by the mechanics of the dawning industrial revolution. Like god and King Louis, he's a clockmaker.





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